The Fiery Call

The Fiery Call

TATRAPRESS — BRATISLAVA 1969

© Tatrapress, 1969

Translation © Dr. J. Selfen, 1969

Illustrations © V. Hložník

Twenty-five years have gone by since the small Slovak nation made a new contribution to modern history. It was an accomplishment which at that time linked Slovaks to the great family of peace-loving and democratic nations fighting against Nazi tyranny, and for a human world, a deed which sprang from purest national aspirations. The Slovak National Uprising, in which the Slovak nation took up arms for liberty, democracy, and a just social order, was probably only an episode of the Second World War, a negligible contribution to the sacrifices of other nations. Yet for us it was and remains the starting point of our contemporary history; we are not as lucky as other nations not needing any heroes... By the Slovak National Uprising the Slovaks also avowed to the idea of a common life in a common State with the Czech nation. Throughout Slovakia, wherever Slovaks took up arms, after many years of servitude and persecution, the Czechoslovak colours were hoisted again as the symbol of the independent Czechoslovak State in which both nations shall have equal rights and obligations. It was the hour when the lawful existence and the autonomy of both nations was born. The legal expression of this idea was the subsequent federal policy of the State. However, the Slovak National

Uprising was not only the expression of national consciousness. It was for our nation also the initiation into the international revolutionary movement, and into new international relations. In the Uprising the Slovaks fought shoulder to shoulder with Czechs, Hungarians, Yugoslavs, French, Ukrainians, Russians, and Germans, united by common rejection of totalitarian Nazism, and by a common vision of a better world of tomorrow.

The reader is offered here a selection of reminiscences of people who prepared the Uprising, and participated in it. This selection cannot offer a synopsis of fates and events of the dramatic autumn of 1944, its aim is only to present to the reader authentic words and events, and the roots of the great determination, sacrifice and superhuman power of those who lived through it, where the character and the moral power of people were tested every hour.

Mankind will always return to the pure fountain of its belief in a better future, in the victory of honour and moral purity. Looking back on the noble deeds we may gain experience in order to future tyranny, wholesale murder, and genocide. A retrospective glance at people who facing death found in themselves the force of self-sacrifice will perhaps strengthen the belief in the possibility of an honourable, just life. The belief in a time to come, when great nations shall respect and acknowledge the rights of little nations, when the human race on its way to interplanetary adventures will not any longer ignore the everyday happiness of mankind.

THE COMPILER

The General

It is not easy to recall a man who whizzed through life like a meteor, only to become all of a sudden extinct and literally lost in the nothingness of cosmic space. Recalling him to mind, his words, his eyes, his face even today have the bitter savour of unfulfilled dreams, only to be overcome by the rehabilitation of his image belonging to-day not only to me, but to the whole nation and to the history of our national liberation.

What kind of a man was he? From where did his courage and determination spring never to think of himself or his family, and to devote his whole life to his nation? These words may sound today out of place, and may be they indeed are inappropriate to interpret what my husband, General Ján Golian felt, when he took part in the preparations for the Slovak National Uprising. Possibly not even I, his wife, shall be able to explain everything he thought and felt; I could not watch every step he made...

He was an upright man and I loved him sincerely and devotedly, his fairness, modesty, kind-heartedness his belief in people, and his ability to enjoy the small pleasures everyday life offered us. And also the deliberateness he showed in face of troubles, the steadfastness in receiving blows, and his courage in joining the conspiracy during World War II.

All that destiny allowed us was ten years' common life. For somebody this might be enough, for somebody little, for me it was but a crumb of the happiness I expected from life. Ten years of perfect harmony and common understanding, years of quiet private bliss and of rousing sensations, which we nurture for our loved one. And then came the time when I had to share him with unknown people I had never seen, or known of previously. My husband knew who they were and I had to be satisfied; he disappeared with them for a day or two, and I thought it was necessary and all right, presuming they were good friends who would certainly help him in case of need.

During those long hours awaiting his return I had time enough to think over and to analyse my love and my feelings, to find out what made me appreciate him so much. Today I am convinced those qualities of his which won my love, my trust, my feelings, sprung from his childhood from his youthful environment. It had been a severe test and he often talked of it, but rather to recall to mind some pleasant incident, than to accuse destiny of injustice to him and his family.

He was born on the 26th of January 1906 in Dombóvár, a small village, in the Tolna county in Hungary. There his father, a native of Šurany, had found a job as a mechanic on the manor of the local landowner. From what his mother related, his parents had a large family, ten children altogether. Only three girls and two boys survived, the others died as babies.

Everyone inherits certain features from his pa-

rents. My husband inherited from his mother the calm and modest nature, and from his father perseverance, a quality which aided the poor boy on his way to gaining an education. The way was not easy. The first years of life he spent in Hungary, then his parents returned to Slovakia and he went to school in the villages Poľný Kesov and Urmín. Later his parents moved to Trnovec nad Váhom, where they remained for the rest of their lives. The first forms of the grammar school he attended at Bojná near Topoľčany, it was an ecclesiastic boarding-school, of course, Hungarian, as were all schools at that time in Slovakia.

Meanwhile the year 1918 came and with it the Czechoslovak Republic. The professors tried to teach in Slovak, but there were few changes. There was even a turn for the worse in the family's affairs, the father's illness prevented him from working, the manor was divided up into lots and their lot was too small to feed the large family. My husband frequently recalled how he had to work hard the whole of the holidays getting in the harvest, roaming the neighbourhood as well to help with the family budget.

Then he came to a technical school in Bratislava. He had to keep himself by giving private lessons, or doing the odd-job-man at the theatre, . . . dreaming of technical studies. This was his great dream pressing the young man forward, a young man on the threshold of life. But at that time the nearest technical faculty was in Brno, and not a penny to cover the expenses — the dream remained unrealizable. His only expedient was a military career.

In 1927 he graduated from Hranice as a second lieutenant in the artillery and having graduated from the artillery college at Olomouc, he was assigned to the 3rd artillery regiment at Litoměřice.

At that time artillery was not motorized as it is now, the guns were drawn by horses. He loved horses, they were one of his few passions. He liked riding and was a successful horse-racer. This hobby enabled him to reach the more advanced Cavalry School at Pardubice. Once he confessed to me in a moment of weakness that his most secret desire was to become manager of a stud farm, to breed horses, dash off on Horseback over wide plains, to excercise and train horses . . .

In 1936 he applied for admission to the Military College. Thunder-clouds hung over the republic, Hitler's threats increased, the security of our State was in danger and general nervousness seized the world. The High Command hastily completed the ranks of the General Staff and my husband was one of the selected officers. It was at this time his true character showed itself: ardour, perseverance and consistency in his work. Three years' studies had to be mastered in a considerably shorter space of time and he studied night after night, rising again early next morning.

Having passed the second year exams, he was sent for practice to division headquarters at Banská Bystrica. At that time he did not even dream of the rôle this town was going to play in his life and in the life of the whole nation.

Mobilization of the Czechoslovak armed forces surprised us in May 1938 in Banská Bystrica together

with the tragic days of autumn 1938. They interfered grievously in his life too. His mother and his older brother remained in Trnovec on the Váh which was ceded to Hungary. His father and one of his sisters had died in the meantime and the other two sisters had emigrated to Brazil during the great economic crisis. Thus, my husband remained alone and especially the separation from his mother troubled him, he would have rather she had been nearer.

But one tragic event followed quickly upon the other, and it came worse and worse. In March 1939 Czechoslovakia was broken up, the Slovak State was proclaimed and the Czechoslovak army disbanded. He meditated much on what to do in the new situation. His first reaction was to go abroad, as many of his comrades, had done, leaving the country designed to take up arms abroad against advancing Fascism. But the mutilated and humiliated republic was too alive in his heart and he was well aware that many brave and loyal patriots would be needed at home, where the fight would be cruel and inexorable; the Nazi hydra had many heads and many faces and until they were eliminated much water would flown down the Hron. So he decided to stay, and await the right opportunity which, he was sure would come.

Soon he was transferred to divisional headquarters at Trenčín, and here the first opportunities offered themselves, as he had planned when he took the decision to remain at home. Trenčín is a town situated not far from the border of what was then called the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, and through it many people passed, fleeing to avoid Nazi brutality and concentration camps. An underground organization was already set up on the border to ensure safety to the persecuted soldiers, and trade-unionists. Trenčín was the halting-place for many who fled through Hungary to Yugoslavia and then farther on to safety.

One afternoon he came home somehow secretive, concealing and inner emotion. I felt at once that something was happening, but I did not show anything outwardly. After a stealthy look at me he disappeared in the larder. He never did this before, he could not possibly be so hungry as to lock himself in, to gorge himself. He selected the best he could find and left the house by the back gate. After this return I did not question him either, I knew he would tell me of his own accord everything he was permitted. Indeed, at dinner he disclosed that a small goup of Czechoslovak military men coming from the Protectorate was seized at the border by a Slovak patrol and conducted to headquarters. The whole affair was put into my husband's hands. Together with some reliable comrades he procured for them a night's lodging, rest, financial aid and safe-conduct to the Hungarian border. With them went our sausages, bacon and tinned goods.

The Slovak underground movement had one of its most important bases at Trenčín. Secret contacts were kept here with the Protectorate on the one hand, and with other Slovak posts on the other hand. One of the leading figures of this base was an officer Milan Polák, who soon discovered my husband's real feelings and reckoned with him for

further illegal services, the extent of which nobody could foresee at that time. As a Czech woman, I was however impressed when I saw and felt how many Slovaks worked from the time of the tragic division for the renewal of the Czechoslovak republic, and how anybody loosing hope and belief is comforted and assured that truth must prevail after all. Noticeably the underground movement grew to a firm organization and in its first stages I also had a modest rôle as a contact; I brought instructions and invitations to meetings to the local bookseller V. Chovan, and together with books I occasionally bought there I brought back other messages.

So we pursued our daily routine, and enjoyed the little pleasures of our common life being convinced that this oppressive epoch would soon reach its end, the world preventing it from striking deep roots. Of course, now I realise that the very source of our hopes and confidence in a happy future was in our own wishful thinking and not in the course of events, which had really just began to disseminate, only to collect the most terrible of all scores — the lives of millions of people, people like we, hoping to avoid fatality, thinking that such petty work as we were accomplishing in those years would be sufficient.

Then came the next stage in our struggle. Hitler's Germany attacked the Soviet Union and the usurpers at Bratislava hastened to declare war too, and the first Slovak units were sent to the eastern front. Many a friend of my husband's had to leave with them, but he himself did everything to avoid this fate; he simply could not imagine to fight shoulder

to shoulder with his greatest enemies, with those who dismembered Czechoslovakia, with those guilty of innumerable tragedies, personal, family and national catastrophes, having no equal in human history.

But the day came, when he received marching orders to the front. The underground movement agreed, and he was charged to find out the real feelings of the rank and file as well as officers on the war, and to gain war experience which later may prove to be useful.

His stay in the front line was instructive, indeed. There he saw how the Slovak soldiers refused to shoot at their Slavonic brothers and dissociated themselves from the Nazi war. He found out how Slovak soldiers tried to help the local population, how they even got in touch with partisans. German officers came to him complaining that Slovak soldiers contact partisans and give them supplies, and he had to pretend not to know anything, and to promise to inquire into the case and if it were true punish the culprits. As a matter of fact, he knew of these contacts, knew that partisans even came to pick up rations, that whole groups of Slovak soldiers were preparing to desert to the other side. Such a mass-desertion was prepared also in his unit, he often mentioned it, but the German forestalled it: disappointed by the Slovak units, they withdrew them from the front, to prevent further strengthening of the partisans.

Thus, my husband returned home. He related to me with enthusiasm how the Slovak boys deserted to the other side, how they often outwitted the

Germans, and how they really felt. This made him more determined to devote all his energy to the preparations for a national uprising. He was convinced it would be a victorious and glorious upheaval demonstrating to the whole world the real feelings and ambitions of the Slovak nation and its determination to live in freedom and democracy.

After his return my husband obviously devoted himself even more to underground work. Frequently he did not come home for supper, and I often did not even know where he was; also, he prepared me for the worst. The Germans and their domestic underlings naturally nosed everywhere for those active in the resistance movement, and more and more frequently we heard reports that this or that one had been arrested, or had to escape under cover of night, or that a warrant of arrest had been issued. We had to reckon with the possibility that the Germans may discover some of the preparations and begin with arrests even in our immediate neighbourhood. Since autumn 1943 we had prepared two knapsacks containing our most necessary belongings, and two forged identity cards to enable us to disappear. In case of emergency our way led to the partisans in the mountains.

Fortunately nothing of this kind happened in Trenčín. The underground organization was working here perfectly, everybody doing his duty unobtrusively.

In January 1944 my husband was transferred to headquarters at Banská Bystrica as chief of staff of the army. At that time Slovak resistance against the Germans and their domestic accomplices had

reached broad dimensions. In the mountains already existed partisan units which were well organized, the underground movement had its network all over the country with secret wireless communications to centres abroad, and the Slovak National Council was already at work, although illegal, co-ordinating the activity of all the local posts, to accomplish preparations for the armed uprising. In this carefully concealed movement my husband had of course his place. I knew that well, though he seldom spoke of himself. Home to Trenčín he came usually only on Sundays and I awaited these scanty hours anxiously, although I knew that even then he belonged only to me. Even during his rare visits to his family he used to visit other leaders of the underground movement, and to participate in meetings, and at home I pondered over the problem, why things must be as they are, why the husband cannot belong only to his wife, the father to his family and the son to his mother. A hundred tormenting questions intruded upon me, I perceived the immense struggle going on not only on the fronts somewhere in remote countries, but in everyone of us. In everyone of us, in every family, in every group.

In June 1944 we moved our household to Banská Bystrica. I looked forward to be from now on more with him, and to be happy. His chief, General Turanec, let us have the flat intended for himself and I was glad to have it, as I was in the family way.

Our flat was not exclusively ours. My husband had all of a sudden so many acquaintances and relatives and I got used to receiving unexpected vi-

sitors late in the evening and to see them leave early in the morning.

As the saying goes, you should be careful of your dreams the first night in a new flat. Usually they are fulfilled. In our new flat I had no time to care about anything, as we had our first guests even before we had unpacked. There were two of them for the first night, one of them was Karol Šmidke, a prominent leader of the Communist Party and one of the leaders of preparations for the armed uprising, who sometimes passed the night with us. The second guest was Dr. Gustav Husák. Later came other visitors, protagonists of the movement, soldiers, and even disguised partisans.

When such unknown visitors left us, I looked at my husband burning with curiosity. No, I was not afraid, I was used to it, although in new surroundings I can't say I didn't have some apprehensions until I knew the people better, but my husband only smiled and answered affectionately. „Those who ask no questions are told no lies!“

So I asked no questions and resigned to my fate, thinking of the child we were expecting very soon. What kind of a world will he live in? Will it still be this world full of disquietude, blood, war-cry, dynamite and graves? I tried to remain calm and composed and avoid unnecessary excitement, helping in my way also my husband, overburdened by work. I could observe it myself, the crowd of people coming to Heaquarters, some of them obviously strange here. It was as in a bee-hive. A good bee-keeper keeps his bees under observation, every movement of the swarm, sitting near the hive when

they fly out, anxious not to lose them... And I waited like that for my husband, feeling how the tension grew from day to day. There came news about the rapidly growing number of partisans and their units not any more restricting themselves to the mountains and forests, but coming down to the villages and even to towns.

This spreading of the partisan movement caused apprehension even at Headquarters. General Turanec suggested to move Army Headquarters to Trenčín. Such a step would cut across all preparations made so far. He was afraid of the partisans while the underground movement reckoned with them. He intended to submit his plan to the then Minister of National Defence General Čatloš. My husband, who had goined the confidence of his chief, succeeded with other officers in postponing the plan.

In those days my husband was seldom at home, the military preparations for the uprising kept him busy day and night. Even if he came home, he just put down his brief-case, ate something in a hurry, and gone he was again to another meeting. Sometimes his chief General Turanec called him by telephone and I had to find instantaneously a suitable subterfuge. Turanec was often imperative, insisted on knowing exactly where my husband was, where he could be found. I had to be very careful not to raise any suspicion, not even by my voice, and just this consideration worried me, but later I grew accustomed and had always several good excuses stored away enabling my husband to perform safety what the political command of the underground movement directed him to do.

The results of this activity became slowly evident. More and more reports came through of partisans appearing in public frightening the Germans as well as their domestic confidents. The rage of the people had reached boiling pount. In small out of way villages in the mountains stores were accumulated for the partisans and army-lorries left barracks with loads of arms and ammunition for the underground movement. The illegal leadership of the antifascist struggle in the army the gradually succeeded according to the agreed upon scheme in concentrating the main combat effectiveness, ammunition and equipment in Central Slovakia.

In the Low Tatra mountains the staff of the partisan forces was already active, was in touch with illegal workers belonging to underground movement, and setting up further partisan units which controlled extensive territories. It stands to reason that such activity could not be kept secret. More conspicuous actions, as was the arrest of Germans in the village Harmanec, brought about vehement protests of the German mission demanding the Slovak Minister of the Interior to take effective measures to guarantee the security of their kindred. Quick action was essential. General Turanec as a result prepared extensive military actions against the partisans. My husband was given the task of convincing the general that the incidents were but irresponsible individual excesses. The incident of Harmanec was eventually quietened down by a remarkable wangle; my husband persuaded Turanec that the partisans prepared to raid the village and to execute the local Nazis, and the latter were

arrested only to save their lives. To appease the general's suspicion he elaborated a plan of battle alert for the garrison of Banská Bystrica, in case of a partisan attack. The alert was practised several times and these exercises were taken very seriously, although their authors were secretly proud and happy to befool General Turanec and his devoted officers.

These measures however were not enough for the all-powerful in Bratislava demanding effective action against the existing partisan units and the frustration of any attempt to form new ones. „Peace and order“ in Central Slovakia had to be ensured at any price. The Army High Command was bound to elaborate plans for the complete eradication of the partisans in Slovakia. The headquarters in charge of these actions was to be in Banská Bystrica. Another great occasion for my husband.

And so it happened that these actions for the most part failed. Soldiers of the regular army combed the mountains, valleys, peaks and forests, not finding the slightest trace of partisans. Officers sent from Bratislava to watch over the great clean-up were deceived and eventually conviced that „peace and order“ prevailed in Central Slovakia and all reports to the contrary were unfounded rumours. Such a report was in fact sent from Banská Bystrica. They had not the slightest notion the partisan units received from reliable sources beforehand news of the planned action against them, often even with the respective map giving them the possibility to evacuate the district in question. Later the coope-

ration was further intensified, and the partisan units took up contact directly with the commanders of the army units ordered to exterminate them, and many a soldier deserted to the side of the partisans. General Turanec never came to know of such things.

For me these days were a test of patience and thoughtful consideration I observed stealthily my husband, and only his composure and the perfect concealment of his inner feelings appeased my own apprehensions and bad forebodings. My husband was an honest man through and through, and I knew only too well how dificult it was for him to feign to be a loyal officer of the Slovak army, having his head and his heart full of troubles and problems of an underground fighter and one of the leaders of the insurgent high command. More than once I asked myself how he is able to achieve all this, and where does he find the courage? The only answer I found was his coniction in the justice of our cause, his belief in the victory of our people that never reconciled itself to fascism. This gave him strength, enabling him to look forward calmly to the future and to take all necessary measures with a thoroughness peculiar to him, right before the very eyes of the Germans. The German Military Mission had its offices in the building of Slovak Army Headquarters, adjoining my husband's. He had to be permanently on tip-toe, not only because of the Germans, but his own personnel too. Not all his officers were trustworthy, it was known that some of them were tale-bearing directly to Bratislava. The German Mission was striving to procure the services of some of our men.

I remember an interlude which fortunately had a harmless end. It was in the summer of 1944, when Dr. Ferjenčík had secretly flown to the Soviet Union. We were initiated and had to keep in touch with his wife. I was just talking to her before the building of garrison headquarters, when I noticed from a window of our flat my husband beckoning to me impatiently. I said good-bye to Mrs. Ferjenčík and hurried upstairs to my husband, waiting excitedly.

— They just came from Bratislava — he whispered in great haste — they are downstairs in the office, may be they came to arrest me. I'll go to see them, but if I don't ring you up within ten minutes, please see my brief-case vanishes with the secret documents to the agreed spot, and take the suit-case too.

And gone he was.

The following minutes were an eternity to me. Gone were all the barriers I had pertinaciously set up during the last months to repel all apprehensions and doubts whether we shall not have to share the fate of tens of underground workers dragged off to gaol and to concentration camps. My husband being a high officer would certainly be treated with the greatest cruelty, they badly needed such a figure as a warning to others. — I stared at the telephone, as if I could produce by magic its well known ring. But the telephone remained silent. At my feet I had the heavy case containing the transmitter of partisan commander Trojan. Again and again I looked at my watch — it was going. Seven minutes had passed already. I was determined to wait exactly three more minutes, and then to take the brief-case and

the case, walk downstairs to the garage, take the car and drive to the agreed place in the country.

I heard my watch tick. The walls of the room seemed to withdraw, the endlessness of every instant was pressing them away. And yet it must ring, it must ring, I repeated, encouraging myself. Only in such instances you discover your true worth, or . . .

The telephone rang.

I heard my husband's cheerful voice:

— They are our friends, everything is O. K.

That took a load off my mind. I sat down and listened to the hear-beat of our off-spring. And again the old question what sort of world will this child live in, how will this tumultuous era receive him, will he have the strength to realize its aspirations... These questions tormented me all the time, although my husband was always anxious to set me at rest, to appease and to divert me, bidding me to be calm and strong, if I wish our child to have those qualities.

Twenty days before the outbreak of the uprising our little son was born. In peaceful times it would have been a delightful event. Unfortunately in this situation, not even the father had time to delight in the birth of his first-born.

To me, in my life, my son came as the symbol and herald of new days. Looking at him I wondered what fates would escort him along the path of life and I entreated for him the strength to grow up an upright man like his father.

We invited a few intimate friends to the christening, preparing a modest family celebration to

welcome the new citizen as custom demands. My husband almost missed even this festival, he came late because of duties not to be delayed, as he explained to the guests. I knew what kind of duties he meant, and I was proud of them in that moment as of a part of a new world we wished for our child and for all such little children, hearing among the first sounds of life the hum of aeroplanes.

My husband guessed my thoughts and tried to cheer me up, although he knew that I am looking deep in his soul and he cannot conceal anything from me.

Events followed rapidly one upon the other. The air around us seemed to be charged with electricity and although I had now hundreds of other problems, I felt the tension. My husband never mentioned what was going on outside, but I felt it. It was indeed sufficient to switch on the radio.

August was drawing to a close. Banská Bystrica was transformed into a military camp, many people came from Bratislava and did not return. Partisans obstructed railway lines and barred tunnels, fires burned on the mountains, aeroplanes droned during the night. I covered my baby with an eiderdown, for fear that he might hear. Bad presentiments molested me, I had evil dreams and there was no chasing them away. Those crucial days had to decide if all the efforts of years were not in vain, if nothing was neglected, if everything would develop as thousands of underground workers had planned and prepared, without any fatal mistake. Time and again I searched the tiny face of our baby for a smile giving me new hope.

One day my husband came home telling me:

— I shall take you away, you cannot remain here.

I did not ask why — he would not have told me anyhow.

— It will be better so.

I believed him.

The last day before the uprising I said good-bye to our home. Together with the two children of my husband's closest co-worker, J. Nosek, we moved to a lone farmstead in the mountains.

The next day the Germans began to occupy Slovakia. The Slovak National Council proclaimed the armed uprising and my husband was overburdened with new duties. He was appointed commander-in-chief of the insurgent armed forces and from then on he lived only for his duties.

Slovakia entered the fight.

Up there on our farmstead I knew little of him, I could not be the witness of his actions, of how he lived, but with every breath, every heartbeat, I was thinking of him.

The days passed, the front was changing and even up there where we lived we could now hear the guns and the bombs dropping. It was war. People began to move up to the moutains and I knew we would not be able to resist the superior force brought into action against us. The territory we held diminished compressed like steel in a press, and soon the leaves began to fall from the trees and winter was approaching. How shall we live it our here? How will my husband live through it?

Soldiers began to bring up to the mountains

supplies of provisions and ammunition, setting up provisional stores — a clear mark that fighting will have to go on throughout the winter, that tormenting months were ahead of us, before we would breathe peacefully again.

I did not know that during those tragic days, when it became clear that it is beyond human power to repel the German divisions armed to the teeth without the heavy arms we needed, comrade Šmidke negotiated with the Soviet Union an agrement, offering to the children and wives of the leading political and military men of the uprising asylum and safety. When the agreement was signed, my husband came and asked me to relieve his anxiety and go to a safe place.

At first I could not accept this idea. We have always been together, in times bad and good, why should I forsake him now?

My husband understood, looking quietly at his son.

— Please understand, there will be for me one worry less. This consideration was decisive. It was a difficult decision, but I had to help him in this step too.

On Friday, the 13th of October, he drove us to the aerodrome, The Three Oaks. It was a dark night full of roaring aeroplanes bringing aid to the insurgent fighters. It was impossible to guess how many there were, they followed one after the other and visible only were the search-lights of those just landing. As soon as one was unloaded the plane took off again.

My husband stood at my side and shortly before the

start he opened his heart. He confided to me many a fact secret till then. He told me that military preparations for the uprising were timed to the days when the Soviet army would have reached Cracow. The quick run of events imposed however a different decision, armed resistance burst out earlier and this is also one of the causes why the fronts could not be held, notwithstanding the considerable aid received and the unbroken resoluteness of the people to achieve final victory. He deplored the terrible disappointment caused to him by the defection of the two eastern divisions of the Slovak army retaining the key to success. They were the best armed divisions and had as their mission to open the way through the Carpathians for the Soviet army. He was deeply shocked. He mentioned also lieutenant-colonel Talský who had not fulfilled orders, and flew to the Soviet Union leaving his soldiers at the nercy of the attacking Germans. He complained of the lack of heavy arms and of the failure of the strong Trenčín garrison abandoned by its appointed commander who came to Banská Bystrica without his men. All this impaired the course of the operations carefully prepared beforehand to the last details.

Then I understood his enormous difficulties, and that my decision was correct to be brought to safety. Not for the sake of my own security, but for his sake who lived painfully through it all.

Yet he was certain that victory will be ours.

The gallant resistance of our units, the revolutionary enthusiasm of the population strengthened him in his unequal struggle against a force

many times superior. I felt it in every one of his words, his looks comforting me and preparing the moment of our separation.

An aircraft came along the taxiway somewhat differing from the others.

It was our plane with which we would travel.

What followed was but the last embrace, the last fare-well.

For ever.

But in my memory he still lives.

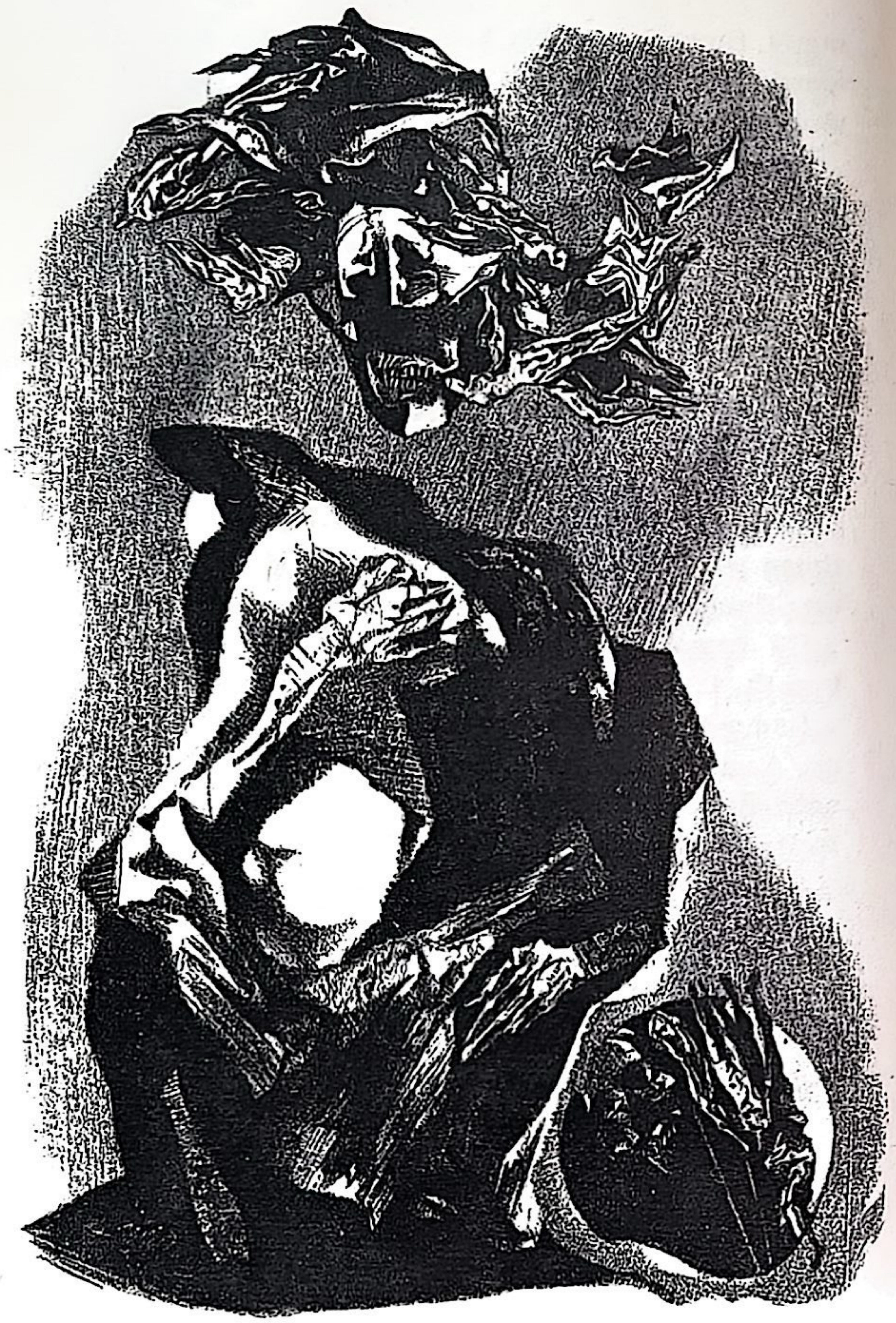
I know that his good friends have not forgotten him, either. They have known him as a devoted patriot, and remained loyal to him even during those years for me the worst of all when his name was denigrated, too.

He remained loyal to his country to his last breath.

Some may consider this as a matter of course, as a duty. But he was conscious of it, acted accordingly in every minute, and sacrificed his life to it.

So will he live in my memory for ever.

According to the reminiscences of the widow of major-general **JÁN GOLIAN**, put to death by the Germans in Berlin, noted down by Peter Srieň



On the Mountains, in the Valleys

When I moved to the forester's cabin below the Stráň near Martin, I had no presentiment of what the walls of this building will have to hide. Solitude is the forester's destination. Having decided upon the green uniform, he chooses solitude — and so did I. The forester's cabin below the Stráň was bordering upon the mountains, and yet near to the town — an ideal place for me.

In 1943 the circumjacent forest received a strange inhabitant. He was neither a forester, nor a forest worker, he was — a deserter. His name was Viliam Žingor, he was called up into the Army and awaited his dispatch to the front. I certainly shall not help Hitler, he said to himself, and instead of going to the barracks he went — to the forests. His intentions were known only to his aunt Knošková, his brother Bohuš, and the forester Jozef Maršala, in whose forest-district Žingor made his hiding-place. His brother Bohuš was a hunter, and under the pretext of shooting he took him supplies up to the mountains.

But it is impossible to keep a secret between foresters. I was one of the first who came to know about it and thenceforth sporting about the woods I kept my eyes and ears open, supposing Žingor would not remain alone.

Autumn was approaching with its rains, and the slopes around Martin were soon covered with snow. Žingor could not remain under the open sky. He found a hiding-place in the forester's cabin.

At that time an organization of underground fighters there was already set up in the environs of Martin seeking first of all contact with the foresters because they know the woods and have the possibility of hiding anybody in time of emergency. From the outset I was a member of this organization, and very soon I also had an occasion to show my courage. Professor Iershov, who was one of the members of our group, told us about two fugitives from a German concentration camp who needed to be hidden for a time, and it was decided that I was to find them a safe place.

One evening Iershov came with them. They were Russians, Ivan Ibin, 25, and Alexis Kraiushkin, 40. Their eyes glanced curiously over the cabin and distrustfully towards the door. — Don't be afraid, said Iershov, here you are quite safe.

My wife immediately served them with scrambled eggs, full plates appropriate for hungry men, encouraging them to eat, but only Kraiushkin followed her bidding, Ibin hesitated.

Funny fugitives refusing to eat, occurred to me. We do our best — and he refuses. Is he suspecting us of trying to poison him?

— Why don't you eat — I gave Ibin a nudge — are you afraid? Eggs are the very thing you need, later you will get sausages and other dishes too!

Ibin did not answer and kept his head, gazing sadly at the plate.

— Well, as you like, I observed reaching for his plate to take it away.

— No, — but I simply can't eat this any more, uttered Ibin at last. And he started to confess. Professor Iershov had brought them along from Ondrej Facuna of Nočov. There Mrs. Facuna was feeding them all the time with scrambled eggs, to buck them up. Now we were all laughing and during the following months, when we teased him, we always threatened to serve him scrambled eggs for dinner.

— Ibin and Kraiushkin passed the winter with us, spending most of their time listening to the radio, catching news of their country, drawing the movements of the front on the map, and reckoning the miles still separating them from their fellow-combatants.

Early in March 1944 our group received word from Ján Repta of Myjava that a number of fugitives hitherto hidden in Myjava on solitary farms must be accomodated in our region, and I was entrusted with this task.

Thus Ibin and Kraiushkin came to have comrades and we had to solve the problem how to accomodate them so that no casual visitor would discover them. After all a forester's cabin is a public place and office, people are coming here to ask for a permission to fell wood, to ask the way to the Martin's Heights or even the country policemen may stop in for a sip of brandy. The police patrol which sometimes visited us was led by J. Krištek.

As soon as my tenants had slightly recovered, they began to think of the struggle. However, some of them had not even arms. There were a few

submachine guns and I could supplement these only with sporting rifles, but that was not enough. They consistently insisted upon everyone having weapons as one never can tell when they will be needed. The German gestapo had their network of agents in the region of Martin too, and none of the men cared to be caught by them unarmed. Eventually we hunted up arms, and the first partisan unit of the Turiec district was formed; soon it was reinforced by another fifteen fugitives.

The forester's cabin changed into barracks. Our guests were sleeping on straw mattresses made-up in the corridor, kitchen, attics, and even some on hay in the loft. My wife and her maid Štefka Kašíková from Turzovka had to strain every nerve to feed them all, to wash the laundry, and mend the clothes. And at the same time we had to think about the security of all of us.

The entrance to the house was permanently locked, we had an agreed upon a signal, and any stranger had to wait till Štefka came to open. And by that time all the guests had clambered up to the loft.

Once it happened that by accident somebody forgot to lock the outside door. A police patrol of four, led by sergeant Krištek, stood already on the threshold when Štefka noticed them. She turned pale, but did not lose her presence of mind. She threw herself in front of Krištek and blocked his way. My wife did the same. Štefka gave them a harsh scolding: — Can't you come in gently? Must you wake the children? — We had no children, but fortunately none of the policemen thought of this.

But the problem was how to warn the partisans still in the kitchen. So in jest my wife asked one of the policemen whether he knows how the jay screeches. He did not, but Štefka instantly imitated the sound — and that was our sign in case of danger. Peter Antzupov was just kneading the dough for the bread in the kitchen. With hands sticky from the mixture he ran to the loft — and with him the rest of the men.

In the twinkling of an eye the ground-floor was empty. I appeared on the veranda inviting the policemen to come in. My wife poured out the drinks and after refreshments Krištek all of a sudden rose to his feet and shouted: „And now hurra y for the partisans!"

My blood ran cold in my veins — could they have noticed anything? I calculated the distance to my carbine hanging on the wall. But the policemen only got up slowly from their chairs.

Give me your carbine and take another for yourself — said Krištek. „We are going up the serpentines to the log-cabin at the summit, looking for a fugitive, there we are sure of him!"

I was relieved. I gave him my weapon with the telescope and hastened to leave the house with them.

We had to pass through high snow to reach the log-cabin. The patrol searched it thoroughly and interrogated the keeper Bohúň, a member of our underground organization, whether he had seen the deserter, a man of about 30 years, 6 feet high, darkeyes and hair, with a short black moustache, dressed as a tourist or hunter, certainly having a rifle...

Krištek was disappointed when Bohuň had no information to offer. New the patrol had to pass over Martin's Heights and the Podkova peak, continuing to Bystrička. It was a tough job. I led them on purpose through the worst snow-drifts, to give them some practice, while I was thinking of the sought-after deserter sitting in our well-heated forester's cabin and now certainly having a game of cards with his comrades.

I repeatedly had to participate in such hunting parties, as the pursuers had only suspicions, but never exact information.

Spring was approaching. I awaited it impatiently, as the larder was empty, supplies gone — and our money too. And the police trips increased.

At a meeting of our underground group we decided that the partisans must leave our forester's cabin. After a long debate we arranged to move them to a hunting-lodge in the valley of Prislopská above Bystrička.

On March 22, 1944 I led there the first group of fifteen men. It was a difficult and tiring tour, snow everywhere — in places as much as one metre high. On the way I showed them the valleys they had become acquainted with hitherto only on the map, and pointed out the surrounding villages to give them their bearings. We found the hunting-lodge, it was unoccupied, and the men started right away on making it their first field partisan camp.

The second group awaited a move. We set out at daybreak, convinced that this journey will likewise succeed. The snow-storm had not calmed down and

we could hardly expect that in such weather anyone would go out man-hunting. We did our best, but we advanced slowly, as the snow was too high and the possibility of orientation very bad. On the way we met two peasants from a nearby village. We lay down, yet they must have seen us. That gave me no peace. I reckoned at all costs it would be better to explain who the people were, that I was leading a group of forest hands, sounded plausible, and may keep the peasants from talking about our expedition. But how to reach them in time? I made up my mind to lead our group only to a point where a straight track leads directly to the hunting-lodge, and to return as quickly as possible to the two univited witnesses of our march.

So I did, not suspecting the consequences of my decision. I could not suspect anything, as when I left the group they were less than a kilometre from the hunting-lodge and no menace whatsoever was imminent. So I kept them in sight for a while as they waded their way through the snow of Príslopská valley, and then I turned round, going downwards in the opposite direction.

Now I had on my mind only one question — to reach the two men, and to dispel any doubt they may have regarding the purpose of our group marching uphill. The high snow did not hamper me particularly, as I was used to it, and before long I perceived the first farmsteads of Lázky. There I shall stop to warm up a little — I thought — and then I shall continue downwards to the village Bystrička. At that very moment, however, I stood

motionless. In the distance I noticed dark figures coming up from Bystrička toward Lázky. The snowstorm had not yet calmed down, and prevented me from making out the people who in such a weather exchanged a warm room for such an inhospitable outing. I forced my pace to reach the first farmstead, and strained every muscle to penetrate with my eyes the curtain of snow. My worst apprehension came true. The men coming uphill were a larger group of policemen and storm-troopers all armed to the teeth...

I sneaked in the first house. In my imagination I saw pictures as in a film... The police will encircle first the whole settlement, then brust into the farmsteads and search every house. The inhabitants will all be driven out into the cold, and every square inch will be ransacked for partisans and arms. I myself was well armed, I had my rifle a pistol, plenty of ammunition, and two hand-grenades. Having concealed carefully all this in the house, I went out to the courtyard. There was no time for long meditation, the situation was extremely explosive. If the police stopped in the settlement, Krištek will certainly be among them and recognize me and insist I go which them as their guide. If they make a detour round the village they will find beyond the settlement the track of the partisans leading straight to the hunting lodge, where the partisans are in hiding — and all our plans are ruined!

It gave me the shivers. In my mind I checked everything we had said and done during the last days, to find out our mistake, because it was obvious

that this was not a routine patrol of the police; something exceptional must have happened. But it was only much later, that I found out. Two of the partisans, who were among the first to arrive at the hunting-lodge, went to fetch the arms they left hidden in the Myjava mountains, where they had operated months ago. Their voyage was carefully prepared and discussed. They had to go through the woods, and around the cellulose mill to the railway station in Martin. For some unknown reason, they changed the route and marched through Bystričky. Unfortunately just that night there was a theft of poultry at Bystrička and policemen came to inquire into the case and catch the thieves. On their way the police patrol met with two unknown men, and asked for their papers. Their identity cards they had from us and were O. K., but the police got into conversation with them and discovered one of them spoke Polish. Both were arrested, led back to the village, reinforcement was called for by telephone from Martin — and the partisans were held on remand. Soon is was found out that they were fugitives from a German concentration-camp, having spent the winter in our forester's cabin, and now on trying to find their way home. Fortunately they concealed the partisan hiding-place at the hunting-lodge above the Prísloppská valley, but there was at once issued a warrant of arrest for me, and its execution entrusted to police-officer Štefan Kuna.

The punishment expedition I saw approaching was part of the security measures arising from the arrest of the two partisans. I watched the expe-

dition as it passed non-stop through the settlement and then set out once more to reach Bystrička. I had already left behind the last of the farmsteads, when I heard at the back of me shouts: „Come on! There they are, there they are!“ Some of the police probably had stayed behind in a hiding-place, and noticed me from a distance. They were shooting in my direction. I jumped in the bottom of a deep ground out brook, the bullets whistled over my head, but I observed that the fire was gradually moving on the other side. It occurred to my that they might not be certain of having seen me, that possibily they were not firing at me. Yet I did not dare to move, I stood motionless the icy water washing my feet and hands, my teeth were chattering . . . I felt as though everything in me was freezing. Soon I was sure they had not noticed me. Some of them a few metres ahead jumped across the brook and ran ahead chasing an invisible enemy, shooting in the air, and bawling — until finally they were lost in the blizzard.

I tried to stand up. I shall never forget the strange feeling of a man freezing alive. Probably even the blood in you gradually freezes as all at once you become indifferent to everything, even the fingers wont obey you, and suddenly you feel funnily warm and quite comfortable even in the icy water. After our liberation I heard the story of a partisan who in Čierny Balog held out several hours under the ice to avoid falling into the hands of the Germans.

With a great effort I rose to my feet. My wet clothes began to freeze. I tried to break the icy surface, but

it was of little use; my only relief would be to get to a heated room. Somehow, I managed to drag myself to Bystrička, but all the time my thoughts were with the partisans in the hunting-lodge, how to warn them. They knew where to move in case of emergancy — but how to let them know?

Eventually I reached Bystrička and found shelter at the Korbeľ family.

There however I learned further bad news. The commander of the partisan camp at the hunting-lodge had sent the night before two of his men to Bystrička to bring the bread baked for them at Knoško's house. They were two Russians, Kolesnikov and Bugadre. In a sparse forest the police caught sight of them and their deputy commander Krištek who was leading them, shouted: Halt! The two partisans leaped behind trees and tried to drive away the police by rifle fire. They possibly would have succeeded, if Krištek had not taken advantage of the confusion stalked up close to the partisans, and fired at Bugadre, who tumbled in the snow. His rifle dropped from his hand. Krištek, noticing this, leaped at him and they began to wrestle. The other partisan, Kolesnikov watched them and at the appropriate moment he fired at Krištek, and hit him in the head. He found Bugadre seriously wounded in the belly, tried to lift him, and to haul him farther into the forest.

— Leave me, — groaned Bugadre. Don't bother about me any more, they must not get you too... Run and tell the boys we have been betrayed what happens to me is of no account... Run, run, while there's still time...

Kolesnikov let Bugadre down from his back. May be he was right. The others must be warned, those still able to fight, to revenge, and pay back all they had to endure.

The police were already dangerously near. Kolesnikov disappeared in the woods, and they found in the snow only the two severely wounded men. They took them to Lázky. There they borrowed a sleigh, and transported both to the hospital in Martin. Krištek died on the way, Bugadre was operated on the same day.

The news of this incident spread like fire over the whole region. A living partisan is at the Martin hospital. Everybody wanted to see him, visitors came one after another, briging presents, flowers. But soon the German secret police appeared, and prohibited all visitors. The patient was removed to a small room and the door had to be permanently locked. They waited for the time when he will be recovered sufficiently for interrogation. Finally they had in their hands not only a living partisan, but also proof that many people in the Turiec region are to be found supporting the partisans. And they needed their names, addresses, the hiding-places, all details.

Bugadre knew it well enough. His wound was healing better than had been expected but he simulated unconsciousness and succeeded in having high temperatures on the thermometer, putting off the hearing for a while.

Pavel Kolesnikov escaped his pursuers, and late in the evening he reached hunting-lodge. He reported what had happened, and so the group set

out the same night in the direction of the Kantorská valley. At daybreak they reached Valeč where they rested in the hay-loft of some reliable people, had a meal, and continued on their way to Blatnice, where they were received by our men. They decided to divide up the group into smaller units, and to scatter to avoid the possible destruction of the whole group. One of the units went to Sebeslavice, with them was Kolesnikov, the other to Kantor, where forester Boďa took care of them.

But I had to return to Bystrička, where I had left my clothes to dry. The reports I heard were not at all pleasant: The police caught three living partisans who had passed the winter in our forester's cabin. Where should I hide? They are certainly searching for me by now. And still I decided to return home. I know the mountains much better than they do. I'll advance carefully and notice in time if anything is suspect around our home.

I reached Stráne in good form. I circled the cabin several times, coming nearer and nearer and closely observing every detail, but nothing at all made me suspect the police had already visited us. Eventually I rang the doorbell in the way agreed upon. I remember till now, it seemed an endless wait, till I heard creaking behind the door. Now a policeman will open the door — I thought — and I'll jump right into the trap. Who knows how long they have been waiting here for me, what they have extorted from my wife, may be they know everything, and need now only proof. May be I should have sent somebody else to broke before me...

Finally the door opened and I saw only my wife.

— Anything new? — I hastened to ask.

— Nothing at all. I am glad to see you back...

— Nobody was looking for me?

— Nobody.

— So they will be tomorrow Let us get busy!

I told my wife what happened during my absence, and we started to work. We must remove all traces that we have been concealing partisans here. We burned up all the straw mattresses papers, all underwear marked KGF-SU (Kriegsgefangene Soviet Union). Some things we threw into the nearby fishpond and soon the place was in perfect order.

We hadn't a wink of sleep all night. Time and again I looked from our room through the window into the darkness outside. Every shadow was suspicious, even the silence around the house seemed to be of a different kind... My way of escape to the mountains was well calculated, if anything occurred I could get away, but what will then happen to my wife, and to all the torn threads of our underground network?

Eventually the new day was breaking. The night having passed quietly, I was calmer. I had left my arms hidden somewhere above Lázky, and now I went to fetch them.

When I returned, my wife was upset and told me that soon after I had left six policemen were here searching the house and asking for me. They were ordered to bring me and my wife to the police station in Martin.

—Wherever would a forester be? Of course, in the forests. Just go and find him, without him I'm

not leaving the house — my wife bellowed at them, knowing how to deal with our police.

Their commander was evidently puzzled, looking at his men, but they just shrugged their shoulders ineffectively.

— Then we shall come and fetch him later, the commander announced — he cannot escape punishment.

That day my wife waited for me very impatienly. Several times she ran into the forest opposite to warn me in advance, before I reach the cabin, as she didn't know if the police might be hidden somewhere. I came in the evening, and when my wife told me what had happened, I felt that now things were getting really critical.

I did not sleep in our bedroom, but in the hay-loft, having with me my arms, and at daybreak. I set out into the mountains. For days during the day I knocked about the mountains and during the night I slept in the hay-loft.

One day I meet with the partisan unit in Kantor and informed them on everything that was going on.

One evening my wife greeted me with the news that police commander Kuna's wife was, here, with the request that I visit them at their flat, as her husband wishes to speak to me privately. I sat at the table and thought hard what to do, concluding that the invitation must be a ruse to arrest me there, because they had not been able to catch me at home.

— I won't go anywhere — I told my wife. If they need me, they should look for me in the mountains.

I won't fall into the trap, I would become the laughing-stock of all Turiec.

I preferred to go on sleeping in the hay-loft, and wandering about the forests in the day-time, anyhow for the next few days to come. Maybe I shall change my mind later...

On one of the following evenings, full of anxiety and expectation, when I just had my dinner, being-on the point of going to the hay-loft, the doorbell rang giving our secret signal.

I took my rifle and went to the verandah.

The doorbell rang incessantly. Now then, I thought, unlocking my rifle, and vehemently opening the door. I was perplexed, as before my door stood Jozef Rakyta from Podháj, together with his little son. Farther, in the darkness, I noticed a third figure.

— I brought you that Russian... He insisted on being brought to you.

— Which Russian? I was unkind, not being able to make out who the third person was.

— Well, the one who escaped from the hospital... He says he is a partisan, and I have no hiding-place for him. Apparently he isn't able to eat everything.

— Bugadre, flashed through my mind. I leapt down the stairs, toward the man in the darkness — it was Bugadre, and he embraced me.

Rakyta and hist little son — brought along only to form an unobstrusive group on the long journey — returned home at once, and we retired to our well heated kitchen, where I learnt further instalments of this man's exciting story and his escape from certain death.

After the operation he remained eight days in the hospital, the sutures were not out, and not yet healed. All the time he simulated to be unable to speak, and reflected on escape. The strict diet had considerably weakened him, but he was confident. His confidence was strengthened by people visiting him secretely and making it clear to him he had where to hide. The cleaner brought him an old ladies' coat, and gave him her own high boots of felt. At nightfall he crept down to the boiler house, and from there climbed over the fence. First of all he went to Avenarius, but he was not at home. There was a warrant to arrest on Avenarius and so he disappeared from home; later we learned that he travelled by train up and down the country.

Bugadre spent the night with us, but I puzzled my brains where to hide him. If something should happen I can't leave him here. He was not cured and weak. Only Iershov could help him — and Iershov did. He received him willingly, and hid him in a concealed cellar under his workshop, where he remained until completely recovered.

In the meantime our whole region was full of fantastic stories about Bugadre's escape. One of the best reminded me of a commonplace detective story. Supposedly a gorgeous limousine drew up at the hospital, two men jumped out and broke into his room, lifted him up and threw him into the car, speeding towards Príbovce. There an aeroplane was already waiting, and took with him for Moscow... He was said to be one of the leaders of the partisan movement, and so they took off him away... The German secret police was of course furious and forced

the Slovak police to increased activity. They insisted on all persons on whom warrants of arrest had been issued to be imprisoned at once. I was one of them.

In the meatime I received some more messages from police commander Kuna, to visit him or any other policeman I trusted. One day I made up my mind to do so, although I was aware of the risk I was running. But the risk was not smaller for the police either, the trap was to be common. I chose Ladislav Felcan, an experienced soldier as my guardian. I was armed, and Felcan, who remained outside in the courtyard, had a hand-grenade ready to throw into the house, if I should be trapped, to help me to escape.

It was not necessary. The police commander was sincere, telling me straight to my face that I was in a sad plight. From the record he had seen, it looked like capital punishment for helping partisans, organizing resistance and equipping of armed groups. As I doubted his words, he produced the document from his pocket and read it to me from A to Z.

Probably I turned pale when he was through with it, asking me what was the truth and what was I able to refute. I decided to try it the other way.

— It is all true, I said — I don't contest anything. I tried to look as calm as possible.

— Well, that's different then, said the commander, and we changed the subject, talking politics. He offered me a good plum brandy and eventually we drank to the health of the partisans.

I could not believe my eyes, when I saw him rise to his feet, showing to me once more the record

tearing them to pieces and throwing them in the stove. It was a perfect proof of goodwill and trust.

Some days later I fulfilled his wish to introduce him to the partisans. I took him by motor cycle to the forester's cabin below the Stráne, where the group commanders had a meeting and introduced him. Štefan Kuna became a reliable co-worker of the partisan movement, more than once he led groups of them over guarded roads, sitting always by the driver's side and nobody of course thought of making a search, seeing the police commander on the front seat. Through him we received thenceforth all news and orders dispatched by Police Headquarters, ardent to exterminate the partisan movement.

That is why my reminiscences at this point belong to him. Without his aid our activity would hardly have reached such dimensions and achieved such remarkable successes, also because he did not live to see freedom. Together with Bohuš Žingor and Oldřich Vorba he was shot by the Nazis near Bukovec, a village in the Low Tatras . . .

According to the reminiscences of **LADISLAV FRIMMEL,** chief forester, retired, written by Peter Srleň

A Drop in the Ocean

Golden sunbeams of the rising sun radiated athwart in the valley below the railway embankment. Dew-drops glittered in the tree-tops. A trail of smoke hung over the engine of the morning express-train, and remained motionless suspended in the air.

In a first class compartment there was a single traveller, a young second lieutenant of the Air Force. He was stretched out over the seats, his head under the open window. Under his shoes he had a special edition of the daily „Slovák" with red headings. It was a Monday and there must have been a special reason why the express train from Hronská Dúbrava hat but few travellers.

— Lieutenant, Žilina is the next station! The grey-haired guard repeated his reveille. He noticed the healthy red face of the young officer fast asleep, who made no movement. Only when the guard shook his shoulder, the traveller opened his eyes, sat up slowly and hugged his knees.

— Next stop Žilina! — smiled the guard. The lieutenant, still sleepy, took a flask from his new leather brief-case, and offered it to the guard. The greyhead took it, swept the flat of his hand over the mouth of the bottle and took a gulp. Then, looking at the flask, he was on the point of praising the drink, when the officer stopped him:

— Have a good draught! Drink to our health!

He took one more, praised it, pushed his cap aside, and saluted: — Good war to you!

The sleepy lieutenant just nodded. The train passed through a tunnel, and he felt very sleepy. The family celebration in honour of his promotion went on until the morning. His in-laws had put on a wonderful spread. An officer in the family and an air-man at that!

He looked complacently at his bluish grey uniform with the rank of officer and the golden badge of a navigator. From his childhood he wished to become a pilot. Now, after his promotion, he is on the way to his unit, the unit East. He was told to report in Žilina, but he would not remain there.

For experienced officers and non-commissioned officers the capers of the military machinery are a matter of course. A young officer, however, must first get used to them. He found out that his unit had left Žilina long ago. In the barracks nobody paid any attention to him.

At last he found a supply officer ready to help him: — I'll re-stamp your travel-papers. You buy a ticket for Prešov. In Kysak you change trains. At the station you can call a taxi by telephone — if you are in a hurry. Your unit is in Kelemeš!

He took his papers, put them in the upper pocket of his waistcoat, saluted smartly — and face about!

Kelemeš! Dickens, I never heard of it! He walked slowly back to the station, his next train was leaving in the early evening. On the way he stopped

at the Grand Coffee-House, full of cold tobacco-smoke, but agreeably cool on this hot summer day.

In was 1944. The war in the East was now going on for three years, and its traces were obvious. You met war victims, you heard of widows, and orphans who had no grave where to light a candle on All Souls' Day.

The coffee-house had, at the moment, only four visitors, butchers from Kysuca, playing cards. A pile of bank-notes lay in front of them. Their ash-trays were full.

Behind them, hidden in a window recess, the lieutenant discovered a former schoolmate from the Military Academy, lieutenant Štefan Filipko.

— Forward march to Kelemeš! He addressed him.

— I could have saved the journey, said Filipko.

— I've just returned from that direction.

And they found out that both were attached to the same unit and they drank to the occasion.

— Well, old man, this looks perfect! He gave Filipko a nudge, leaving the old army motor lorry in front of a well cared-for park. Through the green of old trees gleamed a manor house. They proceeded to it over a neat path, suitcase in hand, and their heads full of expectations. A world stood before them. They were twenty-one.

— Second lieutenant Havran reporting for duty!

— Stand at ease!

Lieutenant Rudolf Galbavý, the commander of the unit, is a taciturn officer. Not even his voice is quite that of a commander.

— Have you been in Žilina?

The second lieutenants produce their papers, but he simply waves them aside.

You are billeted here. There is enough room. Orders are given in the hall. March!

Their steps resounded in the empty corridors, where the branches of some deciduos trees nodded towards the open windows. The tick of Morse signals came from some of the adjacent rooms.

— Second lieutenant, tomorrow morning you will keep the men busy! Unemployed they quarrel. Give them something to do. — The commander seemed to be in a hurry to leave.

— Yes, Sir! Gymnastics?

— Anything you like. Just keep them busy! March!

The commander was gone.

Second lieutenant Havran went down to the park. The men sat in the grass, or stood in groups, some of them walked up and down. Their conversation ceased, but nobody paid any attention to the young officer, although his brand-new uniform strikingly contrasted with their own worn out ones. Their tanned faces conspicuously differed from his pallid cheeks, now blushed by momentary curiosity, but otherwise pale from his protracted stay in the Military Academy.

Eventually he advanced a question:

— How is the service, boys?

Nobody answered. Their interrupted conversation hung in the air.

— Service is always filthy, — resounded finally from a lance corporal whose deportment, face, and uniform gave him away as a reservist.

— Tomorrow morning we shall have a run round he remarked, not addressing anybody in particular. — No more loafing about. Any decent meadow around here? We'll do a bit of exercising.

— Meadows more than enough, answered a corporal.

— Any football at hand?

— We'll hunt up one. The second platoon has one.

— All right then. He turned about to leave. But a question from somewhere stopped him.

— Are you going to fly, Sir?

— Sure!

— Take me as your pilot. I am free.

The man was stretched out in the grass, he could distinguish only his grade — sergeant.

— I might. Your name?

The sergeant turned round and showed his face. The lieutenant opened his eyes.

— Michael! You here?

— As you see. The sergeant rose to his feet, shook hands with him and grinned at the others: This is Charles Havran, as you can see a brand-new second lieutenant, but otherwise quite a fine sort of chap. This here — he showed to the lieutenant — are the wrecks of the first flights. — Chaps, who has something to... He made the gesture known the world-over for a drink.

— I have some, the lieutenant hastened to declare. — I'll be right down.

When he returned, the group had increased.

— You shouldn't have bothered, Sir, grinned the lance — corporal, holding out his tin drinking-glass.

— Well, chaps whats the song?

— Daisy, daisy — answered somebody from the rear. Laughter resounded. Daisy, daisy was the most hackneyed of their songs.

— Well then: One, two, three, four...

It had a horrible start. It sounded like a herd of schoolboys whose voices are breaking.

— False! Stop!

They did not behave as a unit on parade, but they were merry. A meadow was soon found. They had a good game of football and afterwards stretched out on the grass. A soldier resting always starts to muse.

— How long shall we stay here doing nothing. It's time to move... The Germans are done with. Around us nothing but partisans!

— Have you seen them?

— I haven't, but I know who has!

— Nursery tales!

— Go to hell, if you don't believe!

— Believe who?

—Ask for instance Lieutenant Koťa!

The men went arguing. Second lieutenand Havran meditated on what he has heard. He knew Lieutenant Koťa, they were on friendly terms, and Filipko knew him even better. He might ask Filipko...

— Get up, men! Back to barracks!

Tall into ranks!

On the 25th August the commander ordered the crew of pilot sergeant Jankovič and navigator second lieutenant Havran to fly the next day to Zvolen with the report of the commander of the East Flying Group. Return flight by the air-port at Mokraď, where equipment was to be picked up and then return to Prešov.

They started early in the morning, had a perfect flight, and performed their duty in Zvolen before noon. The return flight was scheduled for the next day, so they had plenty of leisure time.

— I'll drop in for a minute to see my friancée in Hronská Dúbrava, said the lieutenant to the sergeant. Tomorrow morning we shall again meet here.

— All right. I am going to Banská Bystrica.

His train crawled through the Hron valley. He had left the house of his fiancée early in the morning, and almost fell asleep now in the train.

— Your identity card! — he was awakened by an energic voice.

He looked up. A young officer with two men, steel helmets on head, stood before him.

— What's got you — he bellowed as answer, recognizing his former schoolmate second lieutenant Štefan Staška. — Whom are you looking for?

— For Germans. Orders. Any German found is arrested.

— What a mess!

— More of it is ahead! Where are you going?

— To the airfield, from there to Kelemeš.

— Cheerio!

Now he was wide awake. He wondered what was going on. May be on the airfield he can learn details.

Around the barracks soldiers were digging trenches. Around the airfield they were busy too.

— Against the partisans! answered the soldiers and smiled.

In front of the hangars he found sergeant Jankovič waiting impatiently.

— Here I am! shouted the lieutenant from a distance.

— Don't hurry. We can't fly. Take-off restriction. Go and see the airfield commander, may be he will give you permission. We shan't go higher than 150 or 200 metres. Something is going on — we must get to our men!

At first the commander refused, but eventually he consented. They took off. Jankovič was a little nervous, but a skilful and experienced pilot. He piloted very low in the Hron valley, flew round the Prašivá peak, and reached the Liptov region.

At the Mokraď airfield they found the same febrile activity. A great three-engined transport aircraft of Ju-352 was on the runway loading arms for Banská Bystrica.

Second lieutenant Havran and Sergeant Jankovič urged the airfield storekeeper to hand them the equipment, and when they had loaded it took off immediately for Prešov.

As soon as they got out of their aircraft, they were surrounded by air-men.

— What's the news? Come on, tell us!

— Strange things going on there, but we can't

make head or tail of it. It was already the 30th August, and it was rumoured that the Germans are occupying Slovakia, disarming the Slovak Army.

All pilots gathered in the park, in a separate group. They had excited discussions, but when they came to the barracks, they were silent and gloomy.

— Be patient, boys, you will come to know everything, — said the higher officers. Nobody is permitted to act on his own!

Easy to say: Don't do anything!

From the German Headquarters at Užhorod there came lieutenant Strohwasser, a Sudeten-German speaking fairly well Czech. He demanded the aerial photographs of the fortifications in the Carpathians. They were not yet printed. He took the negatives, and asked for an aircraft to fly him back. The commander of the 2nd platoon lieutenant Fratrič called sergeant Martin Žlnka and ordered him to fly:

— You know what to do?

Pilot Žlnka, always absorbed in thouglits, always silent, only nodded. Yes, he knew. Instead of Užhorod, he flew to Ľvov, behind the Russian front. With Lieutenant Strohwasser and the photographs of the fortifications.

Such was the mood at the airfield in Prešov. The pilots stayed together all the time listening to the news. The commanding officers decided to call a meeting at the Kelemeš barracks. The commander of the group Major Trnka participated. The pilots urged him to give orders. He asked for patience:

— Don't be afraid, we shall take care of everything.

Later Colonel Talský appeared, the commander of the Slovak Army Corps. While his aircraft was reconditioned, the higher officers urged him to give orders:

— We are expecting orders to move completely to Tri duby!

— I can't give the order.

— Then orders for the defence of our airfield!

— I can't order that either! He gave only evasive answers.

Late in the afternoon he and Major Trnka took off. They flev to Ľvov.

The barracks were like a bee-hive. They caught the news that the Slovak National Uprising had broken out.

— Tomorrow morning we fly! At any prince!

Then came the news that the Uprising was immediately crushed, and Banská Bystrica occupied by the Germans. Sergeant Jankovič and Sergeant Simkanič went to the commander, but received only orders to wait. In the evening, when all the crews were in the park, somebody called from the manor.

— Men, the baronage has decamped!

There were rumours that the daughter of Baron Ardó, the owner of the manor, had connexions in London. The flight of the family now added to the general excitement.

Lieutenant Galbavý called all officers to the commander's office and announced:

— All the three squadrons will fly tomorrow morning to the Soviet Union!

Nobody went to bed. Pilots and navigators studied the maps.

— Behind the front line we have to find the road leading from Przemysl to Ľvov. It is a straight highway running parallel with the railway embankment, crossing it later. North-west from Ľvov is the airfield where we have to land. That' all. Start before sunrise! — The calm commander was sharp and energetic. — Everybody takes only his flying equipment, the baggage follows with the infantry division to Giraltovce.

The plain and concise order at once appeased everyones minds. Everybody went to write a few lines home. They sent cards by the Army Post.

Neither the mechanics nor the air-port personnel wanted to be left to follow with the infantry. The tactical aircrafts for three persons came to the runway loaded with seven or even eight men, and when the last had taken off but few men were left on the airfield. They did not fly in formations, only two or three aircrafts flew together. In one of them were Second lieutenant Havran, Sergeant Jankovič, wireless operator lance-corporal Jaroslav Macalák and four mechanics. They had at hand white, red and green rockets. They had no orders on how to act, they knew only their destination.

In the twilight, at an altitude of two thousand five hundred metres, revolved the fire and smoke of the front, thousands of small and big fires. Jankovič piloted carefully, they never were fired at. They kept to the course.

— The highway! The road to Ľvov! Michael, can you see it? — shouted the lieutenant. The pilot only nodded. They cut across it near Gródek Jagelonski and caught sight of Ľvov.

— Airfield to the left! North-west!

Russian fighter planes started on against them and they were fired at from below. The anti-aircraft defence of Ľvov was firing at them from all directions. They discharged green rockets, but the distinguishing marks on the wings closely resembled the swastika on German planes.

— We must make another round flight over the town, — said the pilot — regardless of the rain of fire. Then they landed. Two other Slovak aircraft were already there, staff sergeant Hanovec and sergeant Bozík with their fighters. Immediately behind them followed another two planes. The rest landed on fields around the town, and some of them even as far as Luck.

Russian soldiers came and led them to a great hall on the air-port. Their comrades who had landed before them were already there. A lieutenant came and asked them to hand over their arms and maps. He made no bodily search.

They had to wait for the arrival of the air-port commander. After about two hours there came another officer telling them they might get shaved. Some girls shaved them and this improved their humour. After the shave they were led to the commander of the air-port.

They found themselves in a spacious room. A door was opened and the general appeared.

— Who are you? — he asked. One of them was expected to come forward and to report, but they were silent. Eventually a soviet officer announced:

— Air-men who have just landed!

— Stand at ease! — ordered the general. Then he

wished to know details about their motives and purposes.

— Why did you not join the Uprising?

— They explained the reason why they could not fly to Banská Bystrica, and that at the railway station at Prešov the Germans were unloading their tanks, thus, they decided to fly to Ľvov.

— All right — said the general. But where are your comrades?

They told him the number and the type of the aircraft.

— Well, we shall try to get them together, concluded the general, giving orders to provide them with highest rations. Very substantial rations, too!

The Polish villages were all very much alike. Their names recalled the villages of Liptov and Gemer and altogether they were similar. The crews stayed a few days in one, a week in another, but none of them left a special impression, may be with the exception of the village Opary, not for itself, but for what happened there.

As the covered lorry drew up and one by one the men climbed down from under the canvas, stretching their legs, one of them suddenly exclaimed:

— Look! They're bringing Martin!

They all hurried to the jeep, in which sergeant Martin Žlnka was seated, but his Russion escort prevented them from coming close. Then they discovered that beside Žlnka was seated the German lieutenant Strohwasser, looking at them rather unkindly.

He had good reason. First, these men together with Žlnka transported him and the maps of the

fortifications in the Carpathian mountains not to German Headquarters at Užhorod, but to Ľvov occupied by the Soviets, and they will now peach upon him again. Seized by the Russians, the Sudeten-German Strohwasser pretended to be a Czechoslovak, who forced the pilot to fly to Ľvov.

Now the air-men explained indeed how it happened. Žlnka joined their group, and remained with them, taciturn, reserved and sarcastic as he always had been. Their travels from village to village, from town to town ended in Slovakia, in Štubňa. There the Prešov airmen were detailed to the first fighter regiment formed mainly of Czechs, and a few Slovaks coming from the Royal Air Force. Some of which had flown over to the Soviet Army sometime ago, when fighting on the Crimea.

On a damp and cold evening, on the playground of a forlorn Polish village, the officers of the first squadron gathered around a Soviet captain.

— We need radar spotters, at least one of you. Who has any experience in this line?

Nobody reported. They had experience in the air. But on the ground?

— Nobody? Commander, if there is no volunteer, you appoint one! — The captain was imperative.

They did not like the idea. Airmen stick not only to their profession, but also to their unit. They don't like to leave it, not even for a promotion.

There was no volunteer, and their commander appointed one. The youngest officer — Karol Havran.

Leave-taking was hasty, the captain was in a hurry. Karol Havran packed his suitcase, took his coat and cap, entered the captain's car — and was gone. The captain had a look at him, but was silent.

The jeep dug through the deep ruts, the wheels half sunk in the mud and the mire. Their car was hardly recognizable for the slush. The captain had a snooze, and was unconcerned about his young companion, as staff officers usually are. Only the driver, quite a young soldier, was busy all the time keeping the car on the move, talking fondly to the motor, as to a horse and having now and then a friendly word for the young officer in the strange uniform. But even the driver grew silent as the approached the front line, ploughed up by enemy artillery. Shells exploded in their proximity, and squirted fountains of mud and water over them.

Second lieutenant Havran was put down at a wide cross-roads with fields all round and which really looked like the bottom of a fish-pond, the only traffic-sign being a half-frozen young soldier regulating the traffic.

— You just ask where first army corps headquarters are!

With no other instructions he found himself up to his ears in mud and surrounded by military vehicles. The young Czechoslovak officer with his suitcase in one hand was completely lost. He stopped one of the military cars:

— Can you tell me where first army corps headquarters are?

They told him to go to the right. After a while he asked again, and was told to go to the left, farther on he was directed to go back. Eventually he sighted a village, and went in that direction and asked a lone soldier:

— Where is first army corps headquarters?

— I don't know.

Striding on, at the other end of the village he met a major, and asked his usual question, he received the concise answer:

— Here.

He found himself but a mile from the crossroads where he was disembarked hours ago.

The spotter of the army corps was highly delighted to see him, having finally the possibility to go on leave. And one day the new spotter Havran with the two hundred and first army corps crossed the frontier of their country, Czechoslovakia. Another day, near Fulnek, he was wounded and was transported to a casualty clearing station.

His belonging were said to follow him in his suitcase, conveyed by the army transport service. He never saw them again. However, he has never complained of the loss. For him it was but a drop in the ocean.

According to the reminiscences of Lieutenant-Colonel **KAROL HAVRAN**, noted down by Ján Jonáš

The Trial

In the Hron valley September brought along with it the end of summer. All shades of green, dominating the landscape since early spring, were slowly losing their deepness of colour. The grass became yellowish, luxuriant clusters of thistles were drying up, and on the forest slopes the first copper-coloured birch leaves glistened.

However, at that time the eternally changing splendour of nature had but few admirers, people were taken up with other thoughts. Seated in our rattling motor-car on the way to Banská Bystrica, we, too, were giving free play to our thoughts. We had left our town behind, our army corps and foot soldiers, and every kilometre the distance from our home increased. I looked stealthily at my fellow-travellers, and from their gloomy faces I read disappointment and reproach. They started somewhere, as if trying to penetrate the secret curtain of our future, trying to figure out what the future holds in store.

When, immediately after the Uprising was proclaimed, we took in Prievidza revolutionary power into our hands, we were certain we should have more opportunity to support our cause. We set up the supply service for our fighting units, organized partisan units to defend the town against the superior force of the fascists, and organised auxiliary units of the civil population to dig trenches and anti-tank blocks. Day and night we were on our feet having but rarely one hour or two of sleep.

However, in the first days of the Uprising the enemy advanced too fast to be checked. He soon occupied our town too. We knew it would not be a walk-over for him, as in the mountains around the town Partisans units were hidden. Their task was to give the enemy no rest, to keep him busy, to interfere with his supplies, to blast the bridges and to blow up his vehicles. The partisan units were formed by tough men determmed to carry out their task to the last. This knowledge only soothed the disappointment and grief in our hearts when it became clear we had to leave the town. Before us was the free, insurgent territory and from our cars we could see swarms of people deepening the trenches. At the bends of the road rocks and trunks of trees were prepared to impede the enemy advance.

What is waiting for us in Banská Bystrica? What tasks will we be given? Shall we be able to cope with them?

All of a sudden our driver stopped the car. In front of us on the roadway an armed man gave us the sign to stop. I looked out of the window and perceived in the autumnal sunshine Zvolen castle ahead of us, and densely wooded mountains all around. We were approaching the centre of the Uprising, and the security service made itself conspicuous. Only now I realised that during our drive nobody had checked who was sitting in the old broken-down Mercedes speeding impatiently ahead.

Of course, at times like this prudence is imperative.

Our driver was about to fly into a passion, but our chief calmed him down with a smile: never mind, brother, orders are orders!

We stopped at the wayside. The partisan before us took his duties very seriously and stood to attention. — Stand up! — At the same moment we noticed his comrade rising from the ditch, his gun pointing at us ready to fire if we did not obey. I looked at them with pleasure. With such splendid boys we can't lose the war!

— Down with them! — saluted the first of them using the partisan password. A lock of black hair curled on his forehead. — Your identity cards!

The driver gave him the car papers. Quite seriously he inspected the car, comparing the data. He walked around the car, and presently his red cockade appeared at our window.

— Your identity cards!

We were pleased by such order on the road, and presented smilingly our cards. He glanced at them, but we had the uneasy feeling that he was confused. He must surely have read that we are the representatives of the revolutionary committee of Prievidza district, on the way to Banská Bystrica. Eventually he uttered:

— Any other documents?

Other documents? But there can be no better ones in this situation! Can he read at all? We looked astonished.

— I mean something with your photograph. Anyone may show this kind.

He was in fact right, it suddenly occurred to me.

We took out our old identity cards, and presented them with the photographs on the top. He took them and sat down in the grass to study them attentively. All sorts of contradictory thoughts were whirling through my mind. Checking up everything seriously like this, he must be already convinced that we are O. K. What is going on? Has something happened? While he was studying our documents, we might at least stretch our limbs. We opened the door.

— You may, he nodded, guessing our intention.

We alighted from the car, and took a deep breath of pleasant autumnal air. Stretching our limbs after a long drive, we made a few steps up and down.

— If anybody leaves the road, I shoot — we suddenly heard the second shout. The second partisan stood by the roadside pointing his submachine gun in our direction. We exchanged glances these two men are after all taking their job more seriously than we initially thought; if they only knew, how urgent our trip was, they wouldn't waste theirs and our time — and keep their bullets for other occasions! They will soon be here, boys! We have already seen them, while you are here on the highway busy with the wrong people! Well, nobody knows us here, but at home they'd stand to attention and salute us! Heaven knows where they are from, the first judging by his diction could be from Štiavnica, but the second...

— Where is your rocket pistol? The first was looking at us inquisitively.

Rocket pistol? Was he crazy? Each of us had his own pistol, but left it on the seat, as we were told

to do, when we left the car. His question made us speechless, rocket pistols are carried only by soldiers, giving the signal to attack, or to lead an aircraft at night... Well, we are drawing near to the insurgent airport, they may have their suspicions in this respect too, but now that he knows who we are...

Now then, let us see! He put a stone on our documents, so the wind wouldn't blow them away and started to search our car. He lifted the seats, opened our suitcases, and brief-cases, and lifted even the floor-covering to see what was underneath. Then he opened the pigeon-hole on the dashboard, and took out the cloth for cleaning the windows, waved it importantly. Our official seals which we were taking to hand-over at Banská Bystrica to prevent their abuse by unfit persons, fell out of the cloth in which it was wrapped.

The man put his hands on his hips and measured us with a look telling: New I have caught you, you gallow-birds, no use pretending any longer, you can't fool us! And with the movements of a burglar snatching up his booty he stowed away our seals in his pockets.

We sat in the car, as he ordered us. My chief asked him for his identity-card, but was told to wait and see what would happen at brigade-headquarters. Headquarters, I considered, would finally settle the question, there is certainly a telephone there, we shall call up Banská Bystrica and they will confirm who we are, and this lout will have to beg our forgiveness! He did not even take a seat in the car, he was standing on the running-board,

holding fast to the open window, his gun in the other hand, and directing the driver.

Headquarters was not for away, in the old office building of Kováčov spa. As we were driving along the villagers outside their homes cast spiteful glances at our car.

— They have caught a spy again, — I just managed to catch the words. A spy, you booby, if you knew who we are! Obviously we are not the first ones to be escorted in this way, but this time, my dear, you will burn your fingers, and get, what you deserve!

— So, here you are! — the guard apostrophised us impudently, as we stopped in front of the former spa office. Before I could give him an answer he had disappeared inside to give his report. I was looking at my chief, he was red from anger and obviously upset — by all means we were arrested, everything pointed to it, the crowd of frowning faces around the car, the finger on the trigger, keeping unfriendly eyes on us. Really, the telephone seems to be our only hope!

— How many Soviet aircraft have you on your conscience? — The partisan is asking to whom we have been taken. His mocking look first at one then the other as if to find out who will be the first to confess. Now I am about to understand the stupid question regarding rocket pistols. I know that on the nearby airport Soviet transport aircraft are bringing every night arms and medicines, probably something happened, somebody has fired a false signal, and a plane crashed, the enemy may be working in a most cunning way... And these men

here now think they have found somebody who will assume responsibility. You will be disappointed, good man, you are at the wrong address, you will be surprised when you learn whom you have caught!

As we were unable to reply, he raised his voice. — You won't talk? I quite expected it! I'll make you talk!

Good heavens, who is this man, attacking us as rudely as the other one before? Who gave them the right to behave in this way?

In the meantime the guard who brought us in, emptied out on the table all our documents and seals. A horrible thought struck me. In our district we caught gangsters pretending to be partisans, who were plundering and murdering on the pretext of revolution. Some of them we liquidated, but may be not all, what if these are now such gangsters in disguise? At a properly organised partisan brigade headquarters such behaviour would not be possible!

— Very interesting! — The man is taking one stamp after the other, dabbing it first on an ink-pad, and then making an impression on a sheet of paper: Partisan Group Rokoš, Partisan Group Vtáčnik, Partisan Group Inovec, he is reading aloud, and then he continues: Revolutionary National Committee of Rudno, Revolutionary National Committee of Prievidza, District Committee of the Communist Party of Slovakia in Prievidza, Partisan Group Baranov...

— I must admit, you are perfectly equipped! he sneered at us.

— These are our seals! How are we to persuade you if you don't believe? My chief was very angry,

but trying to control himself. — We certainly had to have our seals revolutionary power requires them, and we manufactured them ourselves, we the men of the underground movement, to save our comrades, can't you understand?

The eyes of the partisan showed us that he did not even try to understand. With a scornful laugh he was looking at the sheet of paper with all those markings, trying to find further arguments to make us understand that our disavowal was useless. In his mind he evidently had already compiled the whole story of our criminal gang, and he was not disposed to let his spoils go lightly.

— And where did you manufacture them?

— There, where we were working formerly, answered the chief firmly, — in Prievidza!

An angry glance lit the partisan's eyes, and the deep lines around his mouth set into an ironic shakable.

— In Prievidza? I thought so!

It was beginning to dawn on me that we would never get anywhere with this man. He would allow no argument, his preconceived conviction was unhakable.

— In Prievidza. Of course!

— You can surely check up on this, can't you?

— Well, that's just the trouble, gentlemen!

Gentlemen! We are no gentlemen, I was about to shout, we are comrades! — but I remained silent, as I did not want to interfere in the conversation between the two. How many men like you came to us to solicit our help, and everyone received what he needed! None of the partisans

of our region can complain about us! We watched him, waiting for his next objection.

— But you certainly know that Prievidza is occupied by the Germans?

— You blockhead, I was about to jump up, if Prievidza was not in the hands of the Germans, we would not be in your hands, but in a somewhat better company!

— Our documents show...

— Don't exert yourself, it's useless, everybody is trying this trick, referring to a source the Germans have cut us off from. I know the catch from occupied Russia, I am no greenhorn. You don't expect me to send some of my men to Prievidza now to check upon your story? I need them here to catch such birds as you!

— I protest! — My chief, otherwise a quiet little man, rose now full of indignation and pride. Our Revolutionary National Committee of the district is still working, we need also our seals. The partisan seals we are going to deliver to partisan division headquarters, they requested them from us. We have to deliver them at any price!

The man turned his head to the left and grimaced.

— That won't be quite so simple, gentlemen! You may have heard the broadcast that there is a revolution on here! And our revolutionary courts stand no nonsense! Just consider it!

A revolutionary tribunal! Who will judge us? A simpleton like this? And why? We should have destroyed everything but now it is too late! This man cannot be convinced, he is obsessed by his idea, any discussion with him is useless. .

— Call up Banská Bystrica, the Slovak National Council, they know us, and you can save your tribunal the work — I flew up, quite disconcerted. — You have no evidence whatsoever, you have not even found the rocket pistols. — I was aiming at the weak point in his argument.

I saw his face flush, he was extremely angry.

— The Slovak National Council is busy, and we here too. Don't teach me what to do! You won't get away this time! Others didn't manage it, and you won't either.

A man entered bearing hand-grenades, a tall, broad-shouldered man with a fur cap on his head and an impatient look in his eyes.

— Hurry up, will you? How long have I to wait? he slurred through pursed lips.

Our hangman, was my first thought. He is impatient for his victims. Does he take us without trial? Are the victims delivered up to him as on a conveyor belt? How many has he got rid of already? He was standing there with a cigarette hanging from his lower lip, beating time impatiently with his foot, and starting at our questioner with unconcealed reproach for the delay. He was obviously used to a more prompt settlement of similar cases.

— Just wait a while! Is the commander and the commissioner back?

— Not yet — the cigarette quivered.

New hope flared up in me. Naturally, there is no trial without the brigade commander and commissioner, I explained to myself. And they will be certainly more reasonable, will understand the question of the seals, and take the trouble to check

on our statement, justice must remain, justice even in a revolution!

— Well, we'll bring it to an end without them, said our interrogator rising to this feet, — the whole thing is clear. — Listen, have you the record? — he shouted through the open door to the adjacent room, where somebody was typing. Well then, he is preparing our record! But a trial without the commander, without the commissioner — that is ordinary murder. Everything rebelled up in confusion within me, and the spark of hope was gone.

— The first page is ready — came the answer through the door — now I am writing the second.

— Hurry up, I'll dictate you the rest! — Again I felt in his voice the malicious self-assertion of the little man who has unlimited power over the lives of everybody who falls into his grip. But nobody received such authority from the revolution — I had the desire to shout — and when you find out, it will be too late for me, and you, too, can be hanged, comrade, even the revolution has its laws...

— The revolution is inexorable — he was adressing me, as if he had read my thoughts. — You should have realized that before starting, — He paced the room like a schoolmaster in front of his pupils.

All of a sudden he stopped in front of our driver, staring at him intently. Why just before our driver? He had not uttered a word all the time, he stood as if unable to believe his ears, it must all have seemed like a bad dream. Why doesn't he say anything, he knows us well, and for a long time,

he has spent most of the time with us, and he must know the accusation was ridiculous!

— You are a worker — the interrogator referred to our driver. — You are probably mixed up in this accidentally. Prove them to be traitors!

The driver crouched, but his eyes flashed up, he was losing his uncertainty, and regaining energy, nobody could bully him!

— Speak! How did you get in to this? You did not suspect — did you? We'll take that into account — nothing will happen to you!

Evidently the questioner was a wily fellow knowing his job, he had a good training, and knew that between life and death there is an abyss of perplexity attracting feeble characters looking in despair for escape. But our driver was not one of them, I knew him from our underground work, he was an upright, honourable man! Yet, who knows what the sight of death may call forth in him...

— Go ahead! Speak up! — he was urged.

— Why don't you do what the chief suggested? The driver raised his head and looked straight in the eyes of his questioner. — If it's impossible to telephone, get some armed guards and I shall bring you to the Slovak National Council. Or to the Partisan High Command — as you like?

The interrogator squirmed, certainly he was not prepared for this answer and puffed nervously at his cigarette. A gleam of anger in his eyes.

— If you refuse, you don't want to know the truth, you want only our car and leather coats! — The driver shouted and doubtless would have continued, if his questioner had not stopped him.

— Enough! Shut up!

I smiled at the driver, my eyes confirmed his words, his courageous conduct. The abyss between life and death disappeared before my eyes, I felt again solid ground under my feet.

— You all are conspiring together! — thundered our inquisitor. — I'll tackle this from the other end! He struck an attitude, behaving like a demigod. — I'll strip you and take your car to pieces completely, and prove your guilt... you won't get away not from my hands, you can be sure of that!

He called some men, and gave orders to search every inch of the car. — And you, he bellowed at us, put everything you have in your pockets and shoes, on this table. Hurry up, I have no time!

My chief first took out his money, several banknotes of one hundred crowns, a pocket-knife, matches, cigarettes, a fountain-pen. I took out also what I had, it was not much, cigarettes and matches I would keep, a whiff before death will be good... My hand stopped at the inner pocket of my coat — it was sewn up. Heavens, our office cash! More than two hundred thousand crowns, remained in the safe of the Revolutionary Committee, we were going to deliver it at Banská Bystrica together with the accounts.

I glanced at the investigator, his fingers were knocking nervously on the table, his eyes fixed on the pile growing before him. Next to him was seated another partisan called Jožo, smoking incessantly, he had just come in, but the room was already full of smoke. My fingers were trembling in my pocket, my whole body was shaking — what shall I do?

My colleagues had already emptied their pockets, and were now looking at me with comprehension, they knew perfectly well what I was up to. There is no expedient. If I don't produce the money, and they find it our situation will be even worse. And certainly they will find it, a glance through the window convinced me — Our old car looked like a wounded bird, the bonnet raised like wings about to take off in flight, the seat taken out, some men were unpicking them, bawling as in a tavern.

No use pondering, there is no other solution. I began slowly to free the packet from under the lining. If only the money fell into good hands. We should have left it to our partisans, they wouldn't have spent it on drink, like these here certainly will. But now it is too late, in a moment they will stare in as tonishment on seeing such an amount, snatching at it greedily — and our fate will be sealed.

— And this here — I said, unfolding the packet with a single movement of my hand.

— Thousand crown bankrotes! Jožo cried. The interrogator was dumbfounded, his eyes wide open, the cigarette between his lips ready to fall. There was perfect silence in the room. Nobody dared to move, not even to breathe.

But the eyes of all of them were fixed upon the money. Their faces betrayed they would like to fondle it, caress it, and as in old tales divide it up into piles, one for each of them... for you, for you, this for me...

The interrogator was the first to recover his balance. He gave to each of the partisans a bundle of

banknotes to count, and he himself started counting also.

We watched them, as in a dream. May be it is in our favour when they waste their time counting; out of the dark mood a new ray of hope, it needs time and we need time too, time only can help us, it is still not too late.

They fascinated me, everyone perfectly concentraced on the counting. Nobody said a word, only their lips were moving silently, as they counted out in tens the thousand-crown notes and formed them into piles laying them crossways...

They were perfectly, absorbed in their work, if there were not so many of them, we could right now... a nonsense, that would definitively decide our fate... prisoner on the run is most easily shot! Through the window on the yard I saw our old car with nobody around it. The partisans who were busy with it a while ago now fell into ranks — eight men with steel helmets and guns. The ninth standing a few paces in front of them must be their commander, he is viewing the line, and all of a sudden he lifts his hand above his head giving the signal. The guns are now in firing position at their shoulders. In can't hear anything, only a faint jerking sound passed through the guns, probably everything was not working well. Fire! They repeat once more, certainly everything was not to the commander's liking. No doubt, they will take care of us...

I pulled myself together, and tore my gaze away from the panoramic spectacle, not wishing to call my colleagues' attention to it. May they keep up their courage as long as possible!

— Two hundred thirty-six thousand — I heard the interrogator spelling out. His voice was solemn, as if pronoucing a sentence. But he was unable to disguise his triumph. Now everything is clear, and his nerves relaxed.

They counted well, I observed in my mind. Initially the amount was greater, but on our way we gave a few thousand crowns to the parents of a partisan killed in action; it was in our district and it fell to us to try and mollify their sorrow. How strange, I considered, to try to express in money the value of a young life, to evaluate the gratitude and the joy of all he had done, and he still could do in the future! How much is it worth — one hundred thousand, two hundred thousand? If we knew what was ahead of us on this cursed trip, it would have been better to have left them all the money. I simply could not suffer the sight of our tormentor playing with the bundles of banknotes, piling them up on the table, and scattering them again over the table-top.

— Check, mate, sweethearts, you are mate! Two hundred and thirty-six thousand! Quite a decent reward for a single destroyed plane... you must admit?

His look was piercing, his eyes flared.

— You are surprised, aren't you? — With every word he said he was growing more important in his own eyes, now he behaved as if he were delivering a harangue to all four parts of the globe. — But no saboteur can pass here, not as long as the revolutionary power has an interrogator like me!

— I don't even ask you where this money is from!

— He was now savouring his victory. — You are surprised, aren't you? — His look was gliding again and again over the money, as if imagining an unseen hand might steal it. — I will spare you the annoyance and the trouble, I know your answer: We are bringing the money of our district to the Slovak National Council at Banská Bystrica! — he was imitating my chiefs way of speaking. Am I right? Or would you like to hear another explanation? I have some in stock; the same as you. Aren't I right, my darlings?

With such a fool we can't discuss anything. His look was gliding over me, over the table, the walls, to the dirty floor and remained fixed there.

Noise and the stamping of feet in the corridor roused us. Those eight men are coming — it flashed through me. This is the end, everything is lost...

The door was opened, and a crowd pushed into the room. It was difficult to distinguish who was a partisan and who a civilian, all wore plain clothes, battered hats or military caps with red cockades. Suddenly I was afraid that now they were going to distribute the money among themselves, the money for which I was responsible. We should have shared it out at home, to our people, they would have kept it, and returned it when all was over, and free again... but these here...

But the crowd stopped at the door silently their eyes on the money. They did not move, their lips moved, as if in counting... So much money! Perhaps a million, or more! I heard one saying. Another remarked that nobody could have such an amount, but a spy, and his eyes glared at us mistrustfully. I admit, our interrogator is a clever fellow, I think to myself, he knows his job, and arranged this spectacle perfectly. The trick was splendid. In no time the whole village will know that they have caught a gang of saboteurs who came with millions of crowns to bribe honourable people not to to fight against the Germans, to plan sabotage within the isurgent army, to cut the throats of sleeping partisans, and any other fictious horrors human fancy may fabricate. Atrocity propaganda now has a thousand wings, and a thousand tongues, a tiny crumb grows to giant dimensions and innumerable forms, and is blown to all parts of the world, where it grows exuberantly, and spreads, and spreads... everybody will spread this, adding his own commentary... And at the same time you persuade yourself, my good man, as you are not in the least convinced, as you pretend to be regarding our guilt... You will have on hand a crowd of spectators and witnesses when one day somebody should ask you about the president of the Revotionary Committee of Prievidza and his companions on their way to Banská Bystrica... Cheap witnesses, they saw the millions on the table, and the guiltones standing before them with downcast eyes, conscious of their guilt... No, not as long as I am in this game! I thought of those eight armed men in the yard, raised my head, and looked straight and hard into the eyes of all the people crowded in the room looking at us and the heap of bank-notes. Maybe somebody knows me here, our country is so small, and the news has spread by now to all parts, possibly somebody here is from our region. But I

met only scornful looks, intimating their joy... Well, you fell into the trap, you damn fools, no escape for you, they have already dealt here with other criminals having less money than you, your fate is sealed!

The bells were ringing in the village, the cattle returning from their pasture-grounds, I heard cracks of a whip — I was on the point of telling the silent crowd: Don't believe, don't believe...! Believe what, the bank-notes on the table?

— The partisan court is in session! The interrogator stood up, and closed the door on the crowd. He spoke loudly and distinctly, so that everybody should hear and know how just and inexorable was partisan power.

— Public Prosecutor! I addressed him with the most respectful title which I found the most suitable for this sinister figure. He reacted promptly, turned to me, and I saw something like a smile around his pursed lips. Surely he was being addressed in such a manner for the first time. Could I break his stubbornness? I shall try it now, while he is looking at me. His eyes seemed less aggressive, perhaps he wanded to appear more humane, more accessible, but he was unable to conceal his disdain, he expected us to plead guilty even now, when it was too late, — yes that's the way it usually goes, when the noose is already around the neck...

— Wait a minute, please, just a word! I dared to ask him.

His eyes darkened. What about?

— I have nothing to discuss with spies, I am too busy for that. Get out of the way!

He slammed the door behind him, and we remained alone in the room, with only our guard in the corner, where he stood all the time with his gun cocked, but now he stepped forward, perhaps, to show his importance. My friends sat on their chairs lost in gloomy thoughts, obviously taking leave of their far-away families, wives, children, their work... They are doing exactly as I did a few minutes ago. I do not wish to interfere, but we had better do something, at least our eyes should get in touch... by means of a gesture I try to make them raise their eyes... sometimes eyes can say more than words...

— Keep still, will you? The guard bangs the butt of his gun. — Turn to the wall, it will be the safest for you!

Goodness, this is a tough fellow — where did he learn it all? I turned to the wall, but so that I stood near the open window. This guy wouldn't suspect anything... he has his hands full, guarding us all...

I considered the possibility of jumping through the window, whatever happens, I'll jump an unknown power was pushing me gradually nearer to it. Something unknown from the dirty wall was driving me to despair, it held my hand, my throat, my brain, but at the same time a voice told me it's no use, if this ruffian would not hit me, I'll be shot by those in the yard, they are eight... Eventually I convinced myself that there still remained a chance, there will be a trial and we must be given the right of defence, we must be acquitted...

We had to stay facing the wall quite a period

of time and meanwhile it grew dark outdoors.

The door opened, and the interrogator with four armed partisans came in. I recognized them at once, they were from the group of eight who during the afternoon were practising with their rifles in the courtyard.

— Prepare for the journey! — the interrogator ordered us sharply.

For a journey? What kind of a journey? Has the court sat without hearing us and without reading the charges. We stood there unable to move, our legs like lead, stuck to the floor.

— Hurry up! Hurry up! — urged the interrogator. You wished to leave — didn't you?

— And our documents? And other things? — blustered my chief abruptly. During the last minutes he also had considered all apparent possibilities, and had made up his mind to choose the most dignified one not to succomb, to remain upright to the end.

— You won't need them, — was the answer. Hurry up!

— Without our belongings we wont' leave the place! — I screamed out. All the weight I have felt in my legs transformed now in a shriek. — We are waiting for the trial!

— The court has pronounced the judgement — bellowed the interrogator and to his men: — Take them!

The men came forward and first grasped my chief, pushing him through the door. He was not yet through, when he clashed with a tall, breathless partisan who in the same moment embraced him.

— Ján, my fellow, it's you?

— Karol! whispered the chief, Karol look what they are doing with us!

The interrogator was stupefied. His four men stopped looking unconcerned, like waiting to be told what to do, to kill us, or to release us. Such is discipline . . .

But Karol was gushing over with questions, he insisted on knowing everything to the last detail, nothing escaped his attention, but the interrogator, who stood there not knowing what to do, his eyes ablaze, looking at everyone, and yet at nobody. We ignored him completely.

— Karol, just a word — he eventually addressed the giant partisan, going to the door. They left the room together, and we remained alone. We hastened to the door and listened to the loud conversation outside. The interrogator could be heard most easely.

— Aren't you mistaken, Karol?

— Don't be silly, I have know this man for more than twenty years! In 1920 we were in jail together in Šahy.

— And yet I caution you!

— You are a coward!

— All right, I'll call up Bystrica.

We heard them leaving, and we drew a deep breath.

— That's the thing you ought to have done long ago, you . . . revolutionary power . . . !

JÁN KRAJČÍ

Partisan Odyssey

Three of us succeeded in absconding from a German P. O. W. camp, three Yugoslav officers. After long marches and exhausting concealment, we arrived with the help of good people in Eastern Slovakia. It was already 1944.

We hid somewhere in the proximity of the town Humenné — Major Arsa Bolievitch., Air Force Captain Sava Polianetz and myself major of the Yugoslav Army, Ilia Deretitch. Underground fighters of the Communist Party were in touch with us, kept us informed, and took care of us. And yet we were discontented. It came to our ears that somewhere in Eastern Slovakia partisans have appeared and at the first opportunity we turned to the Secretary of the Communist Party, Laiosh Sabo.

— You have fed us long enough. Now we want to repay our debt.

Sabo was sitting with us, smiling and silent, as though not even listening.

— We want to get to the partisans.

— To the partisans? To which partisans?

We did not understand him. What is this man thinking about us? For months we are waiting to take vengeance on the Germans for the shame they brought upon our nations, for months we are anxious to have arms in our hands again — and he

behaves as if we were holiday-makers. What does this mean? Perhaps he mistrusts us?

— Look here, Secretary — I replied impatiently — every child in this village knows there are partisans here. And without your help they obviously couldn't stay a day ... Put us in contact with them.

Sabo considered the matter.

— Well, we could arrange that. The partisan unit of Lieutenant Pugatchev would enrol you.

We changed inquiring glances and felt relieved. The secretary was not concealing anything. He trusted us and that decided matters. Our dream will finally come true.

— When? — I tried to urge him.

— Take your time, — answered Sabo, — it can't be done so hastily.

We were disappointed. First hopes — then prevarications ...

To begin with, you have to regroup — orders of our headquarters. You will go to Central Slovakia — there is more work for you there. — He produced a map, explaining. — Here we have enough fighters. Every now and then we pick up runaways from Hungarian P. O. W. camps. But the fascists are everywhere.

We knew it was no use protesting. We looked at the map and at his finger running up and down and on it our fate depended.

After a few days we shifted to the Turiec region. Everything went smoothly, the movement was well prepared, and we met no unexpected obstacle.

We reached Obdokovice, a village near Topoľčany, and were received by men of the resistance.

Here we felt much better, we already had some definite tasks to undertake. One day Bolievitch brought orders for me to go to Turiec. There they had a runaway, pretendedly a Yugoslav, who had to be checked.

I was glad to go, at least I shall be able to get to know the country a bit which is my present home and where, as it seemed, may soon become our battlefield. On the way I whistled gaily, it never once occurred to me that the supposed Yugoslav could be a Gestapo spy.

I reached Turiec easily and reported to the address given with the pre-arranged watchword.

— Do you know Vasitch? — an unknown man asked me.

— Vasitch, — I repeated after him not very convincingly. The questioner surely had not the faintest idea how many Yugoslavs are called Vasitch. I know villages with more than ten families of this name.

The man looked at me suspiciously from under his shabby hat. Now, I thought, he will start checking on me.

— I have to see him, at least his photograph, I added.

— All right! He instantly led me to a barn. There I found under the cover name of Vasitch Lieutenant-Colonel Dragoliub Hanulovitch. I was pleased. There will be one more in our group...

I was to tramp the distance to Turiec many times, but the most important journey was the one made during the night of August 25th to 26th, 1944. I had to report at a certain place in the village of Raksha. It was a house resembling a country manor

well fit-up and maintained and too striking for underground activity, I thought. I was received in a friendly manner, and showed into a small room, where I had to wait. I was used to waiting by now, awaiting the moment for months when I could fight again, so I was prepared to wait an hour or two in these agreeable surroundings. There were bookshelves on the wall, I glanced over the titles, took one, and sat down at the window to read. I remember as if it was only yesterday the title of the book was „Hannibal“. Absorbed in reading I was not for the moment aware of my surroundings. I did not even notice the door open.

— Who are you — I heard a voice coming from the direction of the door. I raised my eyes and looked perplexed into the muzzles of three submachine guns panting at me. The men holding them were in plain clothes. They've caught me, was my first thought. If at least the window... but it was shut — I should have thought of that earlier!

I raised my hands slowly.

— Not necessary, — murmured the first of the men. — Your name.

— Deretitch — escaped me, I don't know how and why, as I had in my pocket a forged identity card bearing another name.

— Oh! said the first man lowering his gun, and the other two followed him.

Now my host appeared in a frenzy and everything was explained. Partisan Commander Velitchko came to the meeting-place by the back way rusting into the room where I was waiting. May be he was even more surprised to find there an unknown person.

We passed to the adjoining room where the meeting was to be hold. We introduced ourselves, the participants were besides Velitchko the partisan Commander Žingor, professor Iershov and a few civilians.

Velitchko insisted on starting armed operations, but as he could not take the necessary decision alone, he convoked this meeting. The partisans were ready. I drew a deep breath — at last the moment I was waiting for had arrived. I offered my group. I was ordered to move it at once to Sklabin, the partisan Staff Headquarters.

Polianetz with his men came the next day, Bolievitch a day later. I was ordered to prepare the airfield at Sklabin, while Bolievitch and Polianetz were directed to Banská Bystrica. So we parted company and for each of us began a new chapter in his life.

My first action was on the 31st of August. At that time German armoured divisions were already thrusting themselves from all sides into Slovakia and in the pass of Stretchno on the river Váh a bloody battle was in full swing. Our Yugoslavs fought in a common unit with the French partisans and I can say they were brave. Already on the first day N. C. O. R. V. Željko was killed in action, by an aircraft bomb. However not all the groups fought in an organized manner, some seized by panic retreated towards Martin. I was taken by car together with Lieutenant Kuhta, one of the organizers of the partisan movement in the Turiec region, a lean, sinewy, intrepid and sincere man. We were sitting in the front and behind us we had a full load

of hand-grenades. We never reached our place of destination. In the turmoil an armoured car ran in us until today I am at a loss to understand how we were not blown off the face of the earth. The collision caused me serious injuries, and I cursed like a heathen. After so long and so many pains to repay my debts to the German intruders — I was now transported to a hospital. What was even worse, Bolievitch and Polianetz got to know of the disaster, I don't know how, but as usual the news they received was badly exaggerated, my car it was said exploded and nothing and nobody was saved. They insisted on visiting my grave, and their commander had difficulties keeping them in Banská Bystrica. So they buried me in their mind, while I was alive.

When I recovered, I was attached to the fifth tactical group as liaison officer between partisans and army. I must confess this was not a job for me, I would have preferred fighting in the first line. The number of desertions increased, hold-ups became frequent, and the soldiers put the blame for them on the partisans, and the partisans on the soldiers. The morale of some of the commanders was undermined by drunkenness. I did not like it; it grieved me more than our failures at the front, which for us was narrowing. As a matter of fact the Germans had a considerably superior force, but with a better organized fight we could have avoided many a setback. — During my activity I possed through almost all important battlefields of the Turiec region. Later I came to Čremošné and Harmanec, and from there to the mountains, where

I joined in the legendary march through the Low Tatras, over the Kozí Chrbát mountains and the Prašivá mountain to the village of Ľubietava, where we slept in shepherd's huts, permanently hunted by the alpine riflemen of the German Army. Those days were horrible. The partisan units were mixed up, one did not know the other, they distrusted each other, they had lost their leaders and everyone wanted to advance as thinks best. One morning I was horrified to find that during the night somebody had purloined my pistol. Are there pilferers among us? Furiously I started investigations. I searched one partisan after the other — without result. Nothing but stubborn silence. The pistol was not found. I was furious.

— I know where your pistol is — whispered a young partisan, when he was sure nobody was observing us.

I took him aside, as though I was going to search him too.

— Where is it? Speak up!

He looked at me, undecided as to whether to speak the truth or not. In his eyes was fear.

— What are you afraid of? I'll shoot him on the spot!

— Well, that's exactly why you don't have your gun — he whispered withdrawing even more from his group.

— How's that?

— Well, simply... don't look for your pistol... you won't find it... you won't find it on anyone...

— Has it evaporated? I urged him grimly. But he shrugged only his shoulders without saying a word.

I changed tactics, trying a more friendly tune.

— May be I have made a mistake, have I?

I knew of no error, but I had the impression the young man was waiting discover it by myself.

— Yes, it's so. You threatened to shoot everybody going his own way. So they took your weapon, to spare you the trouble.

— And what do you think?

— The men say you are not our commander and you have no right to retain anybody.

Well then — that was it! Without saying a word I turned my back, and left them.

I reckoned only with the chance of coming across somebody knowing me, believing me, somebody fit for reasonable action. This was no idle hope, as the mountains were teeming with insurgents having lost contact with their units, and knocking about on the ridges of the gigantic moutains with the sole aim of getting out of the fire of German guns and planes chasing them continually.

I stepped out at haphazard, and I was lucky. Soon I met Colonel Perko whom I knew from Martin, where he was the commander of the military academy, and two lieutenants seeking a way out of this desperate situation. They tried to find a way to get behind the German lines. As our forces were completely disorganized, and any action with them was without prospects worth mentioning, I joined them. We succeeded to reach Zvolen, where they procured me a permit and I started back for Obdokovice. There people know me, and I know them. I was convinced that only there, and not in unknown surroundings, I can stand the test.

The railway stations I passed were full of German soldiers and military transports hastening to the front. That's the right job for a partisan, I mused, jumping off the train in Dolné Obdokovice.

Under the candle is usually darkest — says an old maxim I remembered, when considering where to choose my first hiding-place. So I went straight to the Notary of the village Čitáre, who made out for me an identity card in the name of Ivan Perko and who also hid me for the present. I looked out for contacts. It was already December 1944, when I finally found Colonel Kiš-Kalina, hidden in the proximity. We met and I was happy, as targets for partisan activity were plenty, even in our neighbourhood, the only difficulty being not to jeopardizie the life the of decent people sheltering me.

During an action undertaken on a farmstead the owner of which was a Jew named Tauber, I fell into identity-card control raid. My coat was hanging in the hall. I asked for permission to fetch it and one of the men went me outside. He obviously suspected me, snatched at it and began rummaging through it. I took advantage of this, asking him if I might go to the lavatory. The man paying attention only to my documents nodded, not raising his eyes.

It is inexplicable where such determination and strength springs from in such moments. I grabbed and unlocked my pistol as quick as lightning, opened the window, and jumped out into the growing dusk. I managed to get beyond the building, seeing in my imagination all the time the face of the man who now had my identity card — his eyes pierced me even in the stack of hay, where I was later

hiding. I expected to hear shots and steps, but everything was quiet — may be they were satisfied in having my card and picture... I waited till nightfall, then I set out cautiously on may way. I had several possibilities. I could again get away to the mountains, to try to contact the partisans again or I could... The second possibility seemed more agreeable. First I had to inform the notary who gave me the forged identity card that it had been taken from me. I reached Obdokovice the same night and told him everything. The notary pacified me.

— You should make yourself scarce for a while he advised me — preferably where there are more people about. He gave me a new identity card issued on the name Ľudovít Markovič, found for me lodgings for a few days, and advised me to travel to Bratislava, where at a given address I would find a shelter for the near future.

And so it happened.

I arrived in Bratislava by train. The railway station was occupied by German soldiers checking papers. There was no escape, every tenth German had a dog, so I had no alternative but to behave calmly and confidently to go ahead, and not betray myself. After all Ľudovít Markovič has not done anything wrong, he is just visiting his family in Bratislava, and tomorrow he will return to his respectable job. All travellers were lined up in front of the soldiers checking the documents, the advance was slow, as the control was a thorough one. Those suspected had to open their luggage, some were separated to one side and the rest rudely dismissed.

Eventually my turn came I gave the German my card and without invitation opened my dispatch-case — all I had there was a shirt and some toilet-requisites. At the same time I glanced at the wall behind the soldier — and could not believe my eyes: I was looking at myself. My expression must have been foolish enough, as the German slipped my card into my hands, closed my dispatch-case, and made a sign to me to pass on... I staggered away from the group, pulled my hat further over my eyes and glanced once more at the wall. I was not mistaken, it was my picture on the poster, taken from my former identity card, and under it a warrant of arrest on my former name, Ivan Perko. — Now I was in a hell of a mess, right in a trap. For such false partisans they offer enormous rewards...

On the way from the station I quicked my steps, not looking to the left, nor the right. I knew the way to the given address from the plans I had repeatedly drawn. All I wished at that moment was a roof over my head and a reliable wall behind me.

I found the address — but nobody was there. I returned there two or three times — in vain. I could not inquire from strangers as it might raise suspicion. The inmates might be arrested, maybe the house is watched... I returned to the railway station, and just caught a train going to Martin. There I knew a lot of people, and the underground organization worked perfectly even during the German occupation. Indeed, soon I was secure in Bystrička, a village near Martin, and I got in touch with Žingor, at that time engaged in unifying the partisan movement. There I remained until the end of the war.

In retrospective this Odyssey seems to me now somehow unreal and unbelievable, like the mere play of fortune, a gamble for a miserable human life, where man's life often hangs by a thread, and I was only one of the insignificant protagonists. However, it taught my Slovak brothers to be a free and proud nation. And I am happy to have been present.

In accordance with the reminiscences of Lieutenant-Colonel Ilia Deretitch of the Yugoslav Army, noted down by **KAROL GALBA**

Rapsody in White

In that memorable year long before Christmas there were heavy snowfalls. All the fields and forests around were one white blanket. People you met walked silently and everyone dragged along with him his own cares. They were in abundance too. In every third family somebody was missing. Here the husband, there a son, or a brother... The news received was contradictory, only the larders cleared dangerously. But rather to that somebody was dead, shot by the Germans, his corpse had been seen, and soon afterwards his mother received a note in his own handwriting, telling he was in good health, hidden with his unit somewhere above the rocks of Jelenská...

We were left to ourselves, everyone with his own hopes. In our village the presence of the Germans was not escpecially troublesome other than some requisitions, life, was not worse than in any other village. However, we knew very well that in the mountains around us there were many of our people needing foodstuffs, warm clothing and shoes. As a rule our men going to the forests to cut wood, took with them provisions for two or three persons. Nobody asked questions, it was a matter of course, only the larders cleared dangerously. But rather to our people than to the German...

Before Christmas the Germans ordered a curfew in our village. At first we thought fighting will begin and we moved to our cellars, lately transformed into winter shelters, moving here our stoves, and we lived down there for several days. But nothing special happened and we gradually returned to the kitchen and living-room, looking out behind the curtains to find out what was going on outside. It was easy to get in touch with the neighbours, we only had to open the window, and so we came to know that during the last few days the Germans had several times combed the pine forest above the spa. Nobody could imagine what induced them to do so. It is true, during the Uprising there were in the spa partisan commanders, but they left the place in time. Could they have hidden anything in the ground? You never can tell with Germans, one is like butter, another like a razor...

After the New Year we were hit by bitter frosts. One morning we were awakened by shots, sub-machine guns were firing nearby. We ran swiftly to the cellar-shelter, and only the more daring among us remained upstairs to see what was happening outside. German patrols were running up and down the village; we thought some partisans might have made their way to the vicinity of the village, and now the Germans were at work.

It was soon over. We had no idea of the tragedy which had taken place in the immediate proximity.

Soon we found out at lunch-time from the farm-steads near the pine wood that the Germans had shot people in the wood. They brought them in the early morning in covered lorries, guarded by heavily armed SS-men with dogs. Forming a column on both sides they drove the civilians, most of them men, off the lorries, and up to the woods.

During the next days this was repeated every morning. We were not allowed to leave our houses, we could only clench our fists at such horrible bestiality. We were frightened to death. It was not

hard to guess who the victims might be. Probably partisans caught in the mountains, our men, brothers, children, participants in the Uprising, underground workers, victims of racial hatred ...

How long will this slaughter last? At night we could not sleep a wink awaiting the first shots at daybreak; we literally felt death stalking around our homesteads. If by any chance the condemned would escape, and hide in our village, the Germans are capable of burning down all our houses, and of shooting all of us ...

We trembled with fear and hopelesness. When will it all end, people sighed and older women prayed day and night, never putting down their rosaries, preying for a peaceful morning.

And then came the evening I shall never forget as long as I live. I remember exactly, it was the evening of January 7, 1945. I was just about to go to bed when the door was quietly opened, and a strange man entered my room. His clothes were dirty, his face unshaven, his eyes blazed as with a high temperature.

I was so frightened I almost screamed out.

The man looked at me, his finger indicating I should be quiet.

— Only to pass the night, he whispered. His hands trembled, as he blew into his cupped hands, he did not dare to come in, he just stood on the threshold and looked around the place.

— No Germans here?

That's just all we require — for the Germans to find here a fugitive, I thought, as he no doubt was one.

— No.

— Then please let me go to the loft, he said blowing incessantly into his numbed hands. Show mercy to me.

I could not decide myself, I called my husband. We took care of the man.

He asserted he fled from execution. What he related was certainly the truth, everything coincided with what we and the whole village knew. He, too, was brought here early in the morning on a lorry and driven up to the forest, together with his comrades. All of a sudden they knew where they were being taken. They stood before a long hillock of fresh earth, and behing it a new long ditch. It was his last chance to escape, if he failed he was done for. The Germans pushed them with their rifle butts. In the East the sun had just risen on the horizon, a fiery, dazzling sphere ..

Shortly the snow around them will be in full daylight.

— The Germans stopped the column, somebody disobeyed the order to get down from the lorry. — He looked around him. — Let us flee, he whispered to his neighbour. He had never seen him before, but he might have the same idea. It is all the same how the end comes. But as long as we live ...

— Now!

He set out against the rising sun, his neighbour in the opposite direction. Behind him the beeches were dicking.

A few leaps and he was among the trees. He did not know why he had run against the sun. Soon he was in the pine wood. He heard the shooting be-

hind, and the bullets whizzling around him. The column of death was in confusion and the prisoners wanted to use the opportunity. The Germans did not know what to do first, to catch the fugitives, or to watch those still on hand. Fortunately they did not let the dogs loose.

He managed to reach the slope. Still running he looked back, whether anybody was behind him. Nobody was, but he saw his neighbour stretched out on the snow, and the SS-men approaching him. They fired at him even at close range.

He vanished into the mountains. For a few days he was hidden in a forester's cabin and now he was on his way home.

When we had accomodated him in the loft, he promised his father would repay. us for this service. We were surprised.

— How's that, said my husband, we don't even know your name.

— My name is Kučer.

We did not care, it was not the time to ask the names of fugitives. He might have slept well, as the next morning he was gone without leaving a trace. I prayed he should not be caught, and forced to tell where he had passed the night.

About all this we did not say a word to anybody in our village. One had to be careful. Time and again strange people appeared in our village, asserting to be partisans, fugitives and I don't know what else, pumping people and causing trouble. Prudence was imperative.

The following events assured us that our nocturnal visitor had not given us away. One chilly, sunny

day a unit of SS-men rushed into our village, running from courtyard to courtyard and searched house after house. We all had to line up with our faces to the wall, while they turned everything upside down. Thrusting pitch-forks into the walls, firing into the dung-heap, they raged and cursed and called us all bandits. The terrified people were at a loss to understand the meaning all of this, but we could imagine well. Certainly the Germans were tracking down our nocturnal visitor.

The search of our house ended well, nothing incriminating was found. However, hidden behind the curtains we observed that from the neighbouring houses some men wer led off toward the magistrates office. It was an ominous sign.

It was not yet over, when somebody screamed:

— Irene! They arrested your father!

I had my heart in my mouth. Father? Why?

My stepmother came running up, weeping and ready to collapse. We could hardly get her into our kitchen. I tried to appease her as best I could though I myself badly needed consolation.

— They have taken him, have taken him, she sobbed. In the loft they found a military trench coat... God knows who has put it there... Such a disaster...!

— Don't be afraid, mother, they will release him... They must release him... He hasn't done anything wrong... Some mistake... I tried to quiet her, being myself full of apprehension.

— You must go to find him, tomorrow, my girl, immediately, they took them offon in a lorry, certainly to Zvolen, there they will be in jail until...

You know what they have committed here not long ago ... Still nobody is to even approach the pine forest ... Good heavens! ...

I could not sleep all night. I reflected where to go, to whom, how to explain ... Trench coats from German military stock were many in our village, but how to explain that father was only clumsy not to hide it as well as the others ... At daybreak I took some money, the best means to approach even in time of war the door of hell, and together with my stepmother we went to Zvolen.

I remember, it was Saturday, and in the town we met more people looking for their father or brother. At Police Headquarters the official on duty — a Slovak — listened to us, shook his head, noted the name, and promised to find out what happened, and where father is retained. He promised to help, if he possibly could of course.

We returned home sad and with little hope. No trace of father, and at the police we were told to wait a few days, but anything can happen, who knows if tomorrow morning there will not be again a firing squad in the forest, another wholesale murder, and one of the victims may by my father. The night was endless, I could not sleep, and I could not think of anything but my father, hallucinations scared me, I heard the clatter of lorries entering our village, and when I sat up everything was silent. It was all a dream. When I lay down again, I heard shots. When the cat made a movement, I started up hearing convulsive sobbing, as at the burial of one of our dear ones ...

Those days were the longest of my life, every

hour was endless. I could find no rest, I accused myself of cowardice, I should have given some money to the police officer. Then he would be sure we did not expect anything for nothing, that we are no worse than the others ...

We visited him again, and I put a bundle of banknotes in his pocket, exactly five thousand crowns, to remind him of my missing father, and my stepmother's husband. He just telephoned and his face brightened.

— Well, ladies, he is here, I've just made sure, it is probably some mistake, I'll try to arrange that you see he-is in good health, and not threatened by any danger. They possibly took him only as a hostage, in case something happens to their soldiers in your village, to intimidate the villagers ... Don't be afraid, and come tomorrow again, everything will be O. K., don't cry ...

Maybe he was in the earnest, maybe his kind attitude was mere routine, who can tell now, after so many years.

The next day he was in high spirits.

— Everything is running smoothly, you will see him, and we shall get him out of this mess. Although ...

Suddenly he was silent. He lighted a cigarette, went to the window and gazed out on the street, then at us, and shook his head as if we had made something wrong. We were disconcerted, not being conscious of any guilt.

— Father testified awkwardly, he said after a while. Very badly. Got himself all mixed up. He had better hold his tongue ...

We were utterly disappointed, not being sure whether all this was true, if father was still living . . .

The following day we came to the police officer determined not to leave without his firm promise of an interview with father. We told him so pointblank.

— You think it is quite simple, don't you? If I had him arrested, I could dispose of him . . . But he was taken by the Germans. You bet I have to grease their palms, to get what I want!

— You have an advance, haven't you, I exploded, as the man became more and more disgusting from day to day. With every word he said my fears grew that we have fallen into the trap of a man who will fleece us.

— An advance? — he remarked with surprise.

— Yes, what said my stepmother wringing her hands, I mean what we gave you . . .

He was manifestly taken aback. Such silly women and so saucy, his eyes revealed involuntarily.

— You just give from what you received, I added, and we shall add to it, when father comes back alive! I was about to say and healthy, as we usually say, but at this instant we would have been satisfied with seeing him for a moment, even without the possibility of talking to him.

— So that's what you think . . .

— We don't think anything, I cut him short, conscious of risking our only chance of seeing father. We know it is not simple, that induced us to pay . . .

— All right then, said our man, showing us out.

Come again tomorrow and if nothing special happens you shall see him.

On our way home we spoke little. Only my stepmother groaned: You see, it will turn out badly, I know it, good heavens, all for a miserable overcoat . . .

I should have calmed her, but I doubted myself. Every time when I crossed the threshold of that man's office, my head was swimming as in a wild dance. In an unguarded moment it came to my mind that I might gain my end by visiting him alone . . . but I was nauseated at the very thought . . . Let us wait till tomorrow.

The following day we were perplexed when he greeted us telling that everything was arranged, we only had to go there and there and to show the slip of paper he had given us. There was the German stamp on it with the imperial eagle.

— You will see your father. You should not think I was . . .

Father was imprisoned in the district jail with many others, the whole building was occupied by Germans. We had to pass many sentries, but producing our slip we were allowed to pass, until we came into a room with no furnishing at all, not even a chair. Only four naked walls.

Presently the door opened and father came in Behind him a German soldier, an old man, greyhaired, with the eyes of the dead, looking downward.

— Three minutes — he showed with his fingers, and we did not know what to do first, to weep, or to make enquiries.

— What do you need, what do you need, repeated my stepmother, but father only shook his head, as not believing that he was really seeing us, and holding our hands.

— They must release you, they must, shouted my stepmother and her voice was full of unveiled hatred and anger.

— Have you been interrogated, father, I hastened to ask him.

He shook his head.

— Interrogated? Here? They sentence you without hearing.

— You don't say so! Without hearing? All of you?

— Since we were arrested none of us was interrogated, nobody cares a fig about us.

Was it a bad sign, or a good one — I did not know. I was despairing, and yet, may be it is a ray of hope, may be they are only hostages indeed. They cannot be prisoners of importance, if nobody cares about them, they must be released ... But how? We were told at the police that father had testified awkwardly ... contradicting himself ... My thoughts were all muddled up, I did not even notice the German dragging father outside, and the door closing behind them.

I never saw father again.

After the liberation we found out that he and many others were shot dead above the village Môťová.

Why? Why? If he was not even heard?

According to the reminiscences of Irena Fojtíková of Kováčová, written by **VLADIMÍR BREZNICKÝ**

The Retreat

The armoured train I had the command of during the Slovak National Uprising, bore the name of HURBAN. I don't know who gave the name, but it was well-chosen. J. M. Hurban was one of the leaders of the insurrection of the Slovak people in the revolutionary year of 1848, and his fighting spirit has been passed down upon the descendants I am now leading once more into battle.

The wheels revolve on the rails, the gun-barrels threaten silently, the locomotive engine ejects every now and again a cloud of smoke. I wonder what is in store for us, und I know that such are also the thoughts of my soldiers, concealed behind the armour-plates of our train. I know there is no pusillanimity in their souls. We have fought and won more than one battle, and we know the enemy is afraid of us. To know this is important for every soldier, this knowledge is often the source of more than one heroic exploit. But how long shall we still have the chance? The territory held by us is dangerously narrowing, the pressure exerted by the enemy is growing every day, his heavy arms multiplying, his air-superiority rapidly increasing.

One of my machine-gunners asked me yesterday: „Well, captain, shall we see it thorugh, or shall we have to retreat?" He was looking at me with eyes

every commander knows very well. They betray devotion, trust and hope, but also hidden apprehension, how may all this end. Such a question then crushes you by the very feeling of responsibility to give the proper answer. You could simply say: Of course we shall see it through — why shouldn't we — if the soldier had no eyes and ears. But he has, he sees and hears. He sees for instance the road swarmed with exhausted insurgent-fighters, he sees heads dressed in white bandages soaked in red blood. He sees horse-drawn vehicles brought to a standstill by their broken-down horses, and soldiers hardly able to stand on their legs, having to push forward the vehicles and horses as well. He hears the guns thundering behind, and he is perfectly aware of the reason of this general retreat. Just we, only we are advancing against the current, twisting through this narrow valley. We are glad to see the rails undamaged, soon we shall be shelling — and shelled.

„Only when we do retreat, then you'll notice" — was my answer to the machine-gunner. „The engine will be behind, and you in front!" I don't know whether he was satisfied with my answer or not, but I was relieved anyhow. The soldier only nodded, but I had the impression of a whisk of a smile on his face, though it is difficult to distinguish now a smile from the bitter perception of reality.

We pass through the otherwise attractive village of Heľpa in the Hron valley. On the hills in front of us we can see exploding shells. „Prepare for battle!" is my order. I am keen on hearing our guns thundering and our machine-guns rattling.

They prevent any soldier from musing, we all feel stronger, concentrating on the fight, not thinking of questions like the one my machine-gunner posed me.

The chiefs of the different sections of the train report that everything is ready for battle. This means also that gun-pointer Second lieutenant Stehlík has already fixed his ranges. I can rely on him, he proved a success each time during these last weeks, and the enemy would hardly expect our intervention just now, when the infantry is in retreat.

At my command our train started the drum fire. Our guns fired sixty-four times. Looking through my binoculars I observed our shells exploding in the station Červená Skala, where the enemy already had his machine-gun nests. We thrashed them thoroughly, I saw the soldiers running around confusedly, some of them seeking cover behind walls, and firing with their machine guns aimless into the mountains around. Their trench howitzers soon followed the example, the whole village was trembling as an earthquake, the echo resounded from all the mountains around. Nearer, men still nearer to them, still we are strong enough to make them jump!

Then I gave the order to return. Our task was completed, for a few hours there will be silence on this section of the front. The enemy thought the road was open right to the centre of the insurgent territory, and now he will have to change his plans.

Previously the armoured train MASARYK was operating in this section, but the enemy succeeded

in destroying it, and thought they were definitively rid of this menace. Their surprise now certainly had an effect. My soldiers are contented, though they know that our most difficult test is still ahead of us, as it was always in the past. Our presence will be announced to the German air force, and they will bomb us as they did so often in the past.

We are dashing off, downward through the Hron valley, shells exploding on both sides of the railway embankment. Soon we shall reach Brezno. Soldiers in retreat on the single road of the valley are beckoning to us, they saw or heard us greeting the enemy, being glad we did it in their name too . . .

None of us could know then that this was our last fight in this section of the front. Though it was evident that the units of „Iron captain" Stanek holding this section for almost two months, are now by a superior force constrained to retreat, I was sure they will gain a footing on a new defensive line somewhere downstream.

Near Podbrezová a boy of about eleven, standing between the rails and making signs, stopped us. Our brakes shrieked. Was he going to join us? Or did he only want to be given a lift? From the children of his age you could expect then anything . . .

— Collision of trains at Dubová! he shouted at the top of his voice. You can't pass!

The boy was excited and out of breath, apparently he was running to meet us to forestall an accident. The rails blocked! On our only way of retreat! And the enemy on our heels! Should this have been the last exploit of our good old Hurban?

We leapt off the train, and ran along the rails. HURBAN is following us slowly. In the evening it is cold and raining.

The scene of the collision dismayed us. It is worse than we thought. The locomotive engines of two trains collided, and ran off the rails. We alone will never cope with this.

By radio I am reporting to Colonel Čáni asking for clearing crews. If they won't show up soon, the Germans will catch us all here like rabbits in a net.

Headquarters promise aid. I am looking at my soldiers, I see the excitement in their eyes, and their apprehensions as to the fate of HURBAN. The railwaymen are standing in a group with gloomy faces. They know their business, they know that to do away with such wreckage is a job for at least two days. But if the rails are not clear by next morning, there is no escape for our HURBAN.

— We should try it alone, men! What do you think? My voice is not convincing.

— We might, answered somebody, but... In our proximity a shell exploded, and the man did not continue.

— They have got us, it occurred to me, but I tried to recover my composure. If they have time to find our range, we are lost. May be in the darkness we shall work a little more safely.

— Until the morning we shall manage it, you'll see! We can't let the train fall into the hands of the Germans!

We are walking around the derailed monsters. Help is coming, but we can start at once, why wait?

— Just wait for the clearing crew, said and old railwayman in a shabby uniform. We'll hear what they say. With bare hands we can't do anything.

I got angry. I felt the anger growing in me, though I tried to suppress it. But now it had found a crack and I could not stop it. To hell with such people! They are the experts, not we, they ought to know how to tackle this job, not we! My men may be looking helplessly at this heap of steel, but this old railwayman shouldn't, or else I'll...

— We shall clear this with our bare hands! I bawled out, but I regretted it at the same moment. — I prefer to try my hands at this scrap-iron, than to stick them up before the enemy!

Wait and see what the experts will say... This war we have lost anyhow, said one of the railwaymen quietly. In other circumstances I might have drawn my pistol, and forced them to work. But something in me surprisingly enough was reconciling me, may be they were right, in their voice was nothing hostile or despondent, on the contrary, there was the same regret in it, we felt it in our hearts.

— To lose this war means to lose all — I tried to speak as quietly as possible — don't you understand? However bad it is, it could be even worse!

— That's it — said the man I apostrophized. Men, let's try it!

I was delighted. If two or three of them begin, the rest will follow, and we will help them. The night is long, and until morning we shall lay the rails open, and good old HURBAN will do some more shooting...

Not far off another shell exploded. I looked furti-

vely at the railwaymen, but they paid no attention to the explosion at all, discussing the working scheme and setting about it.

— Who has no fighting-duty, goes to work — I ordered my soldiers. The spotters, artillerymen and machine-gunners went at their places, and the rest assisted the railwaymen. We could not afford to lose a minute. Soon the emergency train must arrive too, and then ...

The emergency train arrived as expected. The commander inspected the wreckage he did not say a word, but I saw his face growing gloomy. Eventually he took me aside:

— That can't be done till dawn, captain!

— How long do you need?

— At least two days ... really, at least!

— Quiet! I asked him, observing some of my soldiers coming near, probably to know the opinion of an expert:

— Not a word to anybody — I whispered, — nobody is to know your opinion — it would be the end!

— What are you going to do?

— To try the impossible! It is our only escape. Please understand, this is our last effective armoured train, I can't abandon it to the Germans as a present.

— I don't mind, said the commander returning to his train.

In this war the impossible was often made possible, I considered. People have within them superhuman power and courage which drives them on in the struggle for justice and man's most na-

tural longing — is desire for the sake of their liberty. How often my men faced death without wincing! They still prove themselves here, too. Pulling up my sleeves I got busy helping a soldier to pull out a huge piece of steel from under a wagon, I was at a loss to understand how such an immense piece of metal could have got there so intricately between the wheles, making movement impossible. Soon we all were bathed in perspiration as on a hot midsummer noon. A few old carbide lamps were all we had for lighting, but nobody complained, and we paid no attention to the flashes of mines exploding on the hills around us, neither to the artillery shells bursting here and there. Absorbed in my work, I estimated their ranges, and it came to my mind that it cannot last long till they find us here on the track. That is no problem for a soldier.

Yet none of us showed any fear.

With every passing minute the outcome of our efforts became more visible, yard after yard of the rails was cleared. The bitterness in our hearts began to pass away. After all we are not yet definitively defeated, some more shooting is ahead us of! The occurrences of the last days appeared in my memory as in a cinema-show ...

We fell into sudden heavy shooting with the enemy pressing forward on the ridge above the valley, where our train was hidden. It was a hell of a shooting, shells of all kinds drummed on our armour-plated vehicles.

— Go! Go! Away! Quickly! I shouted in the phone to the engine-driver.

The train jumped, but after a few seconds stopped again.

— What's the matter? Why did you stop?

— We are all seriously wounded here, — I heard in the phone, we are unable to manage the engine.

— Dash it! If we stay, they shoot us to pieces!

— Try it again, just pull the regulator, no matter where we get, just out of this hell!

But the phone was quiet, nobody answered...

Sure, they need immediate help, it occurred to me, somebody must sneak up to the engine at once, before it is too late... In the twinkling of an eye the news spread, all the crews became aware of our desperate situation. I can't tell today who it was, whether Trnovský or Matiáš, but one of them volunteered instantly for this breakneck expedition. He leaped off the train, in the dark, and creeped along the railway embankment to the engine. And as if the enemy would suspect our attempt, his drum fire became even worse, we were completely covered by shells from all sides. Now I confess I did not believe myself that somebody could penetrate this fire and reach the engine. I don't know how long he was gone, every minute was an eternity, through my slit I only saw a shadow creeping through the dark, jumping and disappearing jumping again, and disappearing again... now he ought to be there...

— Hold on, men! Hold on! — I howled into the phone — prepare your last charges, in a minute we'll drive off!

Other casualties are reported. Our armoured towers are damaged, we lost contact with our infantry

on their way to drive the enemy from the ridge above us. We have nothing left but a few machine guns.

— Fire! I gave the order. The enemy must not guess why we are stopping, he must think we are ready for battle, maybe he will suspect we received reinforcements...

From the locomotive I heard steam hissing. The soldiers in the next wagon are crying hurrah! Our machine guns are rattling, the train is slowly moving on, then faster...

We got away. In the last minute.

And why should we have come to a dead stop just now?

Our train is gradually hauling away the freed wagons. We all are breathless, but working incessantly. If we hold out, in the morning the rails will be cleared. But the firing is coming closer and closer. In other circumstances I would give the order now to seek cover, and go to battle positions behind the armoured plates. But now?

— Till sunrise we'll cope with it! I bawled to my men. Hurry up!

— The commander of the emergency train is also working with his crew. He glances at me, nodding to the slopes around us, from where the shelling is coming nearer and nearer. I know what he is thinking, I know the danger better than he, I am an old soldier... but I know where the place of the commander now is!

— I am working amidst my men, every hand is welcome now, and may decide everything...

But a bad presentiment overcame me. The shells

are now exploding at less than fifty yards, a single slight move of the gun-pointer, and...

At the very moment it happened.

We were working on last two carriages, when a mine exploded exactly in the midst of our group. Splinters did their work thoroughly. Some of us remained motionless on the ground, the rest scattered in all directions seeking cover. The wounded were crying for help.

I looked at it all, and suffered worse than if I had been hit myself.

That is the end, it occurred to me, all our pains were in vain.

— Well, captain, shall we give up? I heard a quiet voice in the dark.

— No! We can't I screamed into the night, but to whom? Whom can I order, whom can I persuade into going straight to death? The enemy has found its target, all he has to do now is to load and discharge, load and discharge...

— I am going ahead with it, who is going with me?

Some of the soldiers returned from cover.

— We are almost through now aren't we? — I am not asking it from anybody, don't take it as an order. But as for myself, I won't abandon our HURBAN!

— Neither will I — I heard sergeant Těsák's voice.

— Do you realize what awaits you?

— Surely, — I heard him smiling, — in the morning we start the homeward journey, don't we, captain?

Other men followed him. At sunrise the rails were cleared. We buried our dead and took care of the wounded, and our HURBAN started off towards an unknown fate.

While still on the way, I reported everything to headquarters at Banská Bystrica.

At the other end of the line only a the man on night duty answered.

— Give me the commander at once I shouted, impatient to report what had happened, and to propose that the whole crew be decorated for saving our HURBAN.

— There is nobody left here, all are gone, answered the corporal.

— Where?

— Nobody knows. Headquarters are evacuated...

It was at sunrise, the 26th of October 1944.

And now followed what was for me the worst. I had to look in the eyes of the wounded, which I was transporting to the hospital in Banská Bystrica, and tell them that headquarters are preparing to capitulate... The devil!

— Full blast ahead! I ordered the engine-driver. We covered some tens of kilometres, and nobody said a word. Everybody was bidding farewell to HURBAN. Such is war.

When we reached Čremošno I gave the order to destroy all munitions on the train and to arm the crews for further retreat on foot.

They performed the order without saying a word. I watched them leaving in small groups for the nearby mountains. There we shall meet again...

— And what about me? You have no weapon for

me? I was asked in a reproachful voice. It was the engine-driver.

I gave him my pistol.

According the reminiscences of Martin Ďurši-Rubanský, former commander of the armoured train HURBAN, wr:tten by **JOZEF MAJER**

The Next to the Last Victory

October 5th, 1944.

Yesterday our officier, Untersturmführer Jochen Polle returned. We had not expected him back from the hospital yet. When he came in and saw me writing, he at once asked what I was up to. First I was scared, but to my surprise old Jochen added that I should go ahead with the record, as our struggle in Slovakia deserves to be recorded. He even ordered me to keep this diary:

— You noble champions of the SS in Arms, soldiers of today, once you will sit at home smoking a long pipe, as the oldest and most respected of your clan, and whole generations of young people will listen to your words about long past days. But no boasting! Success is on our side, the enemy will be vanquished. Perhaps some of us will be wounded or killed in action. Such is war. And a nice number too! But none of us should waver or give way. Here

---

The original diary of an SS engineers platoon led by its commander Untersturmführer Jochen Polle is deposited in the Museum of the Slovak National Uprising in Banská Bystrica. Its authentic translation published in the following is shocking evidence of the ignorance and narrowmindedness found in the German war machine. Neither their atrocious war experience, nor their heavy losses made the Nazi soldiers understand that their brutalities against people fighting for their liberty are not only immoral, but also futile.

I am again, with hard lines impressed upon my face, and still able to knead from you a crowd of fighters of the old school, to revive the glory of engineers platoon Polle...

And now I don't know. Jochen Polle announced he would revise my writing. But I received an order and have to obey. I am even glad that henceforth the men here will not tease me any more because of my crawling. On the contrary, I shall have more peace. Let's hope!

October 7th, 1944.

We are still in Banská Štiavnica. The weather is not at its best, but we have a pleasant sojourn. Banská Štiavnica is an old German miners' town situated in a valley with its centre on an oval-shaped hill. Our sentinels on the tower „Guck ins Land" have an unusually beautiful panorama of the whole town with its many churches, some of which are of respectable age, with turrets and ornaments on the roof. Old dwelling-houses, many of them with pretty mural decorations, flank the narrow streets and lanes. A section of the main street has terraced houses with shops atracting purchasers to buy and spend their money. The soldiers bought as long as they had a halfpenny in their pockets. We found here many nice things, not seen for a long time. Who would not buy for his sweetheart a gift in this hospitable town! Our intercourse with the inhabitants, in particular with the Germans, is cordial. The part played by the girls in this respect is another question. Of course the heart of every

soldier was delighted to see the lovely creatures bustling about the streets. They have not only pretty faces and hair-dos, but also tasteful and elegant frocks, fine silk stockings, and magnificent bosoms. Three cheers! If only there was no tattoo, many of us thought, hating to interrupt our pleasures . . .

October 11th, 1944.

Last night our idyll was broken. All of a sudden it looked here like manoeuvres in some German town. Just before sunset partisans held up at Teplá a motor lorry of the 4th platoon, and shot the driver and co-driver. The Dethmann group set out at once, but did not find there anything. Late at night they brought the lorry back.

October 16th, 1944.

Today we made a surprise assault on Hungarian territory.

From the broadcast we came to know that Bolshevik gangs are rioting also in Hungary just as in Slovakia. They try to overthrow the government, and ruin the country. I can't understand how people, once our allies, can be talked into such nonsense by the bolshevists. But in Hungary too, brave men defended the most exposed positions, and German units staying in the country made haste to help them. However they needed arms, and our task was to furnish them. At one time we found in Slovakia some loot we did not need, and now we have received an order to set out early in the morning with a strong escort to Hungary. The arms

we loaded on three trucks and set off. The weather was fine and we made good headway. We passed through many villages, in some of them the villagers were waving to us. I don't quite understand them, because they are waving friendly, and assure us of their friendship, but experience shows that we cannot believe them. The population here is all right, but many a Slovak has been deceived by the propaganda of the Uprising, and some of them are even red. In some of the villages we stopped at the police station and collected arms and ammunitions, requisitioned and handed in by the population. It was mainly pistols and guns with plenty of ammunition. But how did these arms find their way to the Slovak villages? Who organized it? The independent Slovak State was friendly to the Reich, and only reliable people had a licence for carrying arms, — at least so we were told . . . Eventually we reached the Hungarian border and were joyfully greeted by Hungarian soldiers. Still more pleased were our German soldiers expecting us there impatiently.

We unloaded our freight, and had a walk through the town. Again the same situation, peace and order on the surface, and yet we were not allowed to stay long. Our commander had doubts. Although the population behaved correctly, sometimes even friendly, we knew that on the highways we had to be careful in this damn country as there was no safety in the evenings and nights. Isolated vehicles were attacked by plundering and murdering gangs.

Our return journey was quiet, and we were anxious to reach Banská Štiavnica, as we were already hungry. But not far away, at a harmless

turn of the road, at nightfall, it happened. All of a sudden hell was let loose and firing broke out from all sides. We leaped off our trucks, and laid down. After a short gun-fight the enemy ceased fire. That's how it usually goes with the partisans. They retreated, but we had losses, Langer was killed, Kubitzky and Shag wounded. Another truck with heavy escort brought us to Banská Štiavnica.

October 17th, 1944.

Yesterday late in the afternoon, in heavy rain, we buried our comrade Langer, the second dead of our platoon. The commander delivered a short speech in military fashion about our past mission. and about the forthcoming one, about the performance of our duty, sacrificing if necessary even our lives, as our comrades had done. We are proud of belonging to the SS, he said.

It was in a downpour, and perhaps this made us all a bit sad.

October 18th, 1944.

None of us will ever forget this day, I think.

Early in the morning our mission was explained to us. We, the engineers, had to start clearing away a triple mine barrier near the village St. Antol, and afterwards, in collaboration with the 13th battalion of field artillery, to secure the town of Krupina.

Evidently it was a difficult task. We knew that more than one of our comrades lost his life in similar actions. But we had to start at once.

Most unpleasant was that we were the advance

guard of the action, and that we had to co-operate with an unknown unit. It is always better to work with people you know, and it requires time to know your neighbour well.

At 4 a. m. we set out, and under protective fire from behind we began to clear the first mine barrier. It was of the usual type, and we cleared it thoroughly. It was a beautiful morning, and we had a good start.

As we were the advance guard, we formed a long line, always on the look-out for the enemy and his tricks. We have already learned not to underrate them. We advanced about two hundred metres, when we came under enemy rifle fire, so heavy that leaves and twigs were falling from the trees on our heads. We heard the field artillery aproaching, and then shelling the positions in front of us. That was sufficient, soon we heard the heavy machine guns from behind, and this was the agreed upon sign for us that we can advance again.

Although the insurgents showed all-round determination, they had to respect our superiour technique. Whatever you say, our motorized guns are arnour-plated, equipped with caterpillar tracks and have a great firing strength.

We entered the village, where everything was quiet. After a sharp bend of the road we found ourselves in a deep ravine, about thirty metres in width and having on both sides densely wooded hills, besides which we were enveloped in a gloomy dusk evoking in us the melancholy of yesterday's burial. But we could not stop, new orders came, we had to start cleaning up the second mine barrier

which was before us, already damaged by our artillery. We sped onwards and meeting no enemy fire we progressed rapidly.

The road did not appear to be a good one. There were so many bends, it was impossible to see far ahead. It was a bad feeling because we expected every moment hell to be let loose and to hear the firing of the guns or machine-guns. None of us said a word, we advanced very carefully, headed by two men with mine-seeking appliances. They found soon the first line of mines, and as the enemy did not fire, we removed them. But we had what to look at since for the first time we found here Russian wooden mines with highly sensitive fuses. A damn job! The men were swearing, as every fifty metres we found another line of these mines. It was a tough job to clear them off, as after the rains of the last days the mines were hard to locate in the marshy ground. We had to work with our bayonets, a dirty, unbecoming job for engineers.

All this meant that we advanced now very slowly, being all the time aware that we are exposed to a sudden attack. As we got out of a forest, two aircraft appeared above us. They were our aircraft. M. 109, but they fired at us. Though we met no enemy, we had to be extremely careful.

Before the top of a hill another line of mines awaited us. It was hard work again, but fortunately we had our motorized guns, we fixed cables on them, and they advanced on their caterpillar tracks. All of a sudden we heard an explosion ahead of us, then a cloud of smoke — we know it was something seriuos. Indeed, old man Wecke has run on a mine.

He behaved wonderfully. His right leg was lacerated, the left also seriously affected, yet he was fully conscious. While we helped him he was explaining to us all the time the way these mines work, and how we have to deal with them. Today he had removed twenty-eight of them, but this, the twenty-ninth, was fatal. I said good-bye to him and shook the hand of this brave man knowing that he probably would not reach the hospital alive. Leaving he told us: See you again!

Such is the German soldier, and people often are unable to comprehend. Some allege this to be inhuman, but we know that it is a fundamental feature of our nation which produces the best soldiers in the world. No other nation can compete with such splendid proofs of German bravery. Here in Slovakia we have met gangsters fighting with desperate obstinacy, sometimes even with heroism, but nothing can be a match for the absolute discipline of a German soldier! When we heard Wecke's farewell amidst the gloomy forest, we were completely reanimated. Our work is spade-work indeed, today, as so frequently before, the success of the entire action depends on us. What a pride, what a feeling of delight are such words in these situations.

Once, when we started our march into Slovakia, a Slovak prisoner speaking perfect German asked me which side is fighting in this war for the just cause. What did he mean? Have these insurgents and Bolshevik gangs such heroes? Which of them has the courage to keep to his post in spite of everything?

We left the forest very cautiously. Ahead of us, on ascending ground, we discovered another obstacle, a giant tree hewn across the vista. This spot was chosen by a good soldier, as only a few tanks at this point get out of the forest and go into action, I knew at once this will be a hard nut to crack. Indeed, no sooner had we reached this section than enemy machine guns opened fire.

A leap over the road through the cursed dusk — and down into the ditch!

Then I felt ashamed. Old man Feigl was already up the tree and seeking for mines — and I still in the ditch. All of a sudden a detonation made the ground tremble. A mine Feigl was just about to render harmless exploded, and tore off his leg. He lost consciousness, and we dragged him away. Once more we had to part company with one of our best men.

The enemy fired fiercely, and expecially the ricocheted bullets caused trouble. The commander of the platoon and Rusnek were slightly wounded. We had to seek cover behind a tank, as for some time advance was impossible. After a while another tank came through and made for the village situated below us. We ran after it, but we could not prevent the tank from running on a mine. The tank was badly damaged, and put out of action, but the crew escaped without any serious injuries. However, the engineers were ordered forward to fill the large crater so we could proceed. It wasn't an easy job, we had to bring up rocks from a distance, while the enemy never ceased shelling us. When the work was finally completed we resumed our advance,

but in the same moment we got a direct hit from that damned cannon. Again we had casualties. Our young and always cheerful comrade Hanns Boemanns from the Rhine lost his life here, Weber, Weis and Voss had to be transported to the hospital. Additional farewells and again our number diminished by four. We get less and less.

As we approached the village we had to seek cover after every discharge, and the shells fell damned near. Only old man Ulmer was fearless, again and again he ran over the road to dig out mines during the short intervals between shelling. After great efforts and additional casualties we eventually reached a village called Žibritov. As we reached the other end, we came again under enemy fire. Finally in the valley we succeeded locating the enemy and all our guns and machine guns poured out flashes of fire without consideration for anybody and anything.

Without our tanks we would not have made a step, but keeping in a line with the tanks we succeeded to pass another bend in the road. There we had to take cover in face of a formidable explosion. An armour piercing shell hit one of our tanks. How fortunate that the insurgents have no anti-tank guns, they would wipe us out completely! So we retired to a little forest, and resumed our advance later, when other tanks came and assured our superiority.

As we were waiting for the tanks, we observed two Russian soldiers at about three hundred metres from us, callously and with extreme calm, placing mines. They certainly were experienced front-line

fighters, as none of the insurgent gangsters would dare to show such impudence or boldness. We advanced more swiftly now. Knowing where the last mines were laid and of others we need not be afraid the enemy's car had passed along the road a short while ago.

Nevertheless we had several times to throw ourselves in the mud and to strike back at the firing enemy, but at nightfall we reached a point from where we could see Krupina. In front of us was an anti-tank obstacle, in the distance a steep hill behind a brook. The obstacle was quickly removed, and we grouped to enter the town, when suddenly heavy shelling came from the hill. We saw at once it was regular military work, and later we found out that we had in front of us a Czechoslovak division trained in Russia. What followed was infernal. All the enemy had guns, machine guns, cannons were thrown into action. But we were not idle either; our tanks proved their firing capacity once more, and our rockets and artillery were also brought into action.

The battle was bloody, but short. We performed our duty. With our tanks at the head, followed by infantry, we occupied the town. We came after the infantry, and marched till late in the night, lamenting our lost comrades. When we were finally accomodated in a hotel, old man Ulmer was called to the commander to report his heroic deeds. Today he had rendered harmless 95 shells and 127 mines, contributing essentially to our success.

Altogether our engineers' platoon today eliminated nine heavy abstacles, 171 shells, 233 mines. In addition to the casualties already mentioned Wulff, Titz, Ehrenreich and Schaach were wounded. So this day has ended as none of us had imagined it, when we buried Langer yesterday.

Now it is night, and it is raining. I am pondering over this day. We know our commander took off his own iron cross and pinned it at the breast of a young soldier. He shook his hand and greeted us all with an engineers' Sieg Heil!

It is raining in Krupina, and I am reflecting upon the puzzle why all the bravery and heroism of German soldiers have not yet brought about the victory over the dark forces. What is the secret of the Bolshevist gangs, and of the Communist agitators that brought about such unwavering resistance of this tiny and beautiful Slovakia in face of the best army of the world? Surely the Bolshevist commissaries at pistol-point, push the desperate population into the hopeless fight against us. No other explication is possible.

But the end is near, we are approaching Zvolen and Banská Bystrica, the heart of the revolt. When we occupy these towns the adventure is over.

If I condense the events of this bloody day, I must realize that it is only the great moral and fighting power of the German soldiers that is gaining victory over the most difficult of obstructions.

Our final victory is imminent!

(Extracted by **PETER SEVER** from the original diary of an SS engineers' platoon, led by Untersturmführer Jochen Polle.)

CONTENTS

The General 9

On the Mountains, in the Valleys 33

A Drop in the Ocean 55

The Trial 73

Partisan Odyssey 97

Rhapsody in White 111

The Retreat 125

The Next to the Last Victory 141

Published by Obzor Publishing House

— Tatrapress, Bratislava 1969.

Translation Dr. J. Selfen

Illustrations V. Hložník

Design I. Bednář

Edited by E. Braxatorisová

Printed in Polygrafické závody n. p.,

Bratislava. Pages 156. Not for sale.